

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
24 JULY 2020 | VOL.203 No.6 | £4.50 | €6.95*

A vaccine breakthrough in Oxford ¹⁹

How Europe abandoned Italy ¹⁵

The Guardian Weekly

The

great

untangling

Can Britain unthread itself from China?

10

Afghanistan AFN 0.90 Bahrain BHD2.25 Czech Rep CZK180 Denmark DKK49 Egypt EGP79 Hong Kong HKD58 Hungary HUF1190
*Republic of Ireland €6.95 Japan JPY1300 Lebanon LBP10000 Norway NOK65 Oman OMR1.75 Pakistan PKR795 Poland PLN21.70
Qatar QAR20 Singapore SGD10 South Africa SAR79.90 Sweden SEK69 Switzerland CHF10 Turkey TRY32 UAE AED20 *Exclusions apply



pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY:
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



Eyewitness United Kingdom

PHOTOGRAPH:
GRAEME ROBERTSON

📍 What goes up

"Hope flows through this statue," Marc Quinn said. Not for long. A day after the British sculptor had installed a likeness of Black Lives Matter protester Jen Reid on the plinth vacated by Edward Colston, Bristol Council took it down. The mayor, Marvin Rees, said only the city could decide how to replace the doomed slave trader



The Guardian Weekly
Founded in Manchester,
England
4 July 1919

Vol 203 | Issue N° 6

Guardian Weekly is an edited selection of some of the best journalism found in the Guardian and Observer newspapers in the UK and the Guardian's digital editions in the UK, US and Australia.

The weekly magazine has an international focus and three editions: global, Australia and North America. The Guardian was founded in 1821, and Guardian Weekly in 1919. We exist to hold power to account in the name of the public interest, to uphold liberal and progressive values, to fight for the common good, and to build hope. Our values, as laid out by editor CP Scott in 1921, are honesty, integrity, courage, fairness, and a sense of duty to the reader and the community. The Guardian is wholly owned by the Scott Trust, a body whose purpose is "to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity". We have no proprietor or shareholders, and any profit made is re-invested in journalism.

This Carbon Balanced magazine is fully recyclable and printed on FSC® Recycled certified pulp



PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW



*Britain v China;
a hard-won EU deal
and vaccines hopes*

The west's relationship with China is changing rapidly. The last few weeks have seen a new security law in Hong Kong, more footage of mistreatment of Uighurs in north-western China and increased fears over Chinese technology. On Monday, the UK announced the end of an extradition policy with Hong Kong and banned the export of riot control equipment following the imposition of the security law. These moves came after the announcement that Huawei would be removed from the UK's 5G infrastructure. Some politicians in the UK want to go even further - but can Britain really untangle itself from this complicated relationship? **The big story** *page 10* →

After four days of brutal negotiations, on Tuesday morning EU leaders finally agreed a deal for a Covid-19 recovery fund. Our Brussels team report on the significance of the deal on page 18. Before that, we feature a special investigation by Daniel Boffey, alongside reporters from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, into the bloc's initial response to the crisis. We reveal how early warnings about the dangers of the coronavirus were ignored and that when Italy put in a desperate plea for help on 26 February, there was silence from its neighbours. What lessons has the European commission learned? **Spotlight Europe** page 15 →

Alongside bad Covid-19 news from around the world - and especially in the US (see p30) - there were a few signs of hope this week. Health editor Sarah Boseley reports on the news that the vaccine from the team at Oxford University has shown promising early results and is creating an immune response in patients. Further trials are still needed, but if it - and another vaccine from China at the same stage of testing - are successful, we could be a matter of months away from the start of a vaccine rollout.

Spotlight science *page 19* →



On the cover

The great untangling

In the space of a few days, the UK announced it would pull Chinese telecoms giant Huawei from its 5G network by 2027, as part of broader moves to assuage security concerns.

Illustration:
Guardian Design



4-14 GLOBAL REPORT

Headlines from the last seven days

10 **The big story** Britain untangles from China

15-33 SPOTLIGHT
*In-depth reporting
and analysis*

15 **Europe** How the EU ignored Covid-19

18 **Europe** A recovery deal, finally ...

19 **Science** Some good vaccine news!

20 **Tourism** Can hotspot cities find a new way?

21 **Japan** Does Tokyo still want the Olympics?

22 **Kenya** Female rangers
27 **Afghanistan** Kabul's mura
boom

28 **Space** The Mars traffic jam
30 **US** The looming Covid-19
winter

34-44 **FEATURES**
*Long reads, interviews
and essays*

34 Nespresso's pod cult

By Ed Cumming

40 How Bild rules Germany
By Thomas Meaney

45-50 OPINION

45 **Jonathan Freedland**
Biden must win a landslide

47 **Rafael Behr**

48 **The UK's lonely Brexit**
Marina Hyde

51-60 CULTURE
TV, film, music, theatre,
art, architecture & more
Theatre

How theatres will make themselves Covid-secure

54 **Music**
Why the three Chicks
dropped Dixie

57 **Books**
David Mitchell's paean to
Swinging London

Join the community
Twitter: @guardianweekly
facebook.com/guardianweekly
Instagram: @guardian

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS:
MATT BLEASE

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

1 UNITED STATES

Trump refuses to commit to election result as polls dive

A major poll released last Sunday showed Joe Biden leading Donald Trump by 15% among registered voters nationally and holding a 20-point lead when it comes to who Americans trust to handle the coronavirus pandemic. In the same ABC News/Washington Post poll, Biden led by two points in March and 10 points in May. Now, among respondents who said they will certainly vote in November, Biden leads by 11%.

A Fox News poll released on the same day put Biden ahead on coronavirus, race relations and the economy and eight points up nationally. However in an interview with Fox News Sunday pre-recorded at the White House last week, Trump said "I'm not losing, because those are fake polls" and refused to say if he would accept the result if Biden won in November. Biden ran coronavirus-themed ads during the interview in six battleground states.

Trump, 74, declined a chance to say his 77-year-old challenger was "senile" but said: "I'd say he's not competent to be president." The Fox News poll found that more people think Biden is mentally sound compared to Trump.

Jonathan Freedland page 45 →



2 TECHNOLOGY



Spyware firm may be forced to disclose client details

An Israeli company whose spyware has been used to target journalists in India, politicians in Spain and human rights activists in Morocco may be forced to divulge information about its government clients and practices after a judge in California ruled that a lawsuit against the company could proceed.

NSO Group was sued by WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, last year, after the messaging app accused the company of sending malware to 1,400 of its users and targeting their phones. Ruling that the case could proceed in a US district court in California, Judge Phyllis Hamilton said she had not been entirely persuaded by NSO Group that it had no role in the targeting of WhatsApp's users.

4 SPAIN

Former Catalan president headed 'criminal' family

A Spanish judge plans to charge former Catalan president Jordi Pujol, along with his wife Marta Ferrusola, his seven children and 18 other individuals linked to the family, with forming a criminal organisation that used its political influence to amass "a disproportionate fortune".

Pujol was Catalonia's first democratically elected president after the Franco dictatorship at the end of the 1970s, a position he held for 23 years. His *Convergència i Unió* party dominated Catalan politics.

In his ruling, judge José de la Mata of the Audiencia Nacional, the criminal court that deals with terrorism and organised crime, said a seven-and-a-half-year investigation had exposed the family as a criminal organisation involved in money laundering, tax fraud and false documentation. The judge said that some of this activity took place when Pujol was the Catalan president.

The scandal first broke in 2014 when Pujol admitted that he had failed to declare funds held in Andorra, which he claimed derived from his inheritance.

3 ECONOMICS

World Bank wants Covid-19 reduction in debt payments

Private-sector lenders to some of the world's poorest countries should agree plans to reduce debt payments or risk turning the Covid-19 pandemic into a deeper economic crisis, the World Bank's chief economist said.

Carmen Reinhart said banks and hedge funds that lend to the developing world should cooperate to allow poorer countries to pay for vital medical and food supplies.

The call follows a report showing that the IMF has allowed countries to spend \$11.3bn of bailout cash to service private sector debts.

5 UNITED STATES

Trump praises federal agents in Portland protests

Federal agents sent to confront protesters in Portland have "done a fantastic job" and could be deployed to other cities, Donald Trump said on Monday.

The mayor of Portland has called for Trump to withdraw the federal agents, and the Oregon attorney general has filed a lawsuit seeking the same end. The governor and the state's two senators, all Democrats, have also complained. The largest city in Oregon has seen more than 50 nights of protest over police brutality and systemic racism, arising from the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May.

GW

Copyright © 2020 GNM Ltd. All rights reserved

Published weekly by Guardian News & Media Ltd, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London, N1 9GU, UK

Printed by Wyndeham Group, Bicester

Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office

ISSN 0958-9996

To advertise contact advertising.enquiries@theguardian.com

To subscribe visit gu.com/subscribe/weekly

Manage your subscription at subscribe.theguardian.com/manage

Or contact UK, Europe and Rest of World gwsubs@theguardian.com +44 (0) 330 333 6767

6 UNITED STATES

Scientists rebuke Trump for denigrating expertise

More than 1,200 members of the US National Academy of Sciences rebuked Donald Trump's "denigration of scientific expertise". The co-organisers of an open letter seeking to "restore science-based policy in government" say they have rapidly gained signatures during the coronavirus pandemic.

Scientists have watched the Trump administration downplay the crisis and ignore expert advice. In the latest affront to the scientific world, the White House is reportedly seeking to block funding for testing and tracing.

The US disaster *page 30* →

8 GUYANA

US invokes travel bans as disputed election drags on

The UK is under pressure to join the US in imposing sanctions on the president of Guyana, David Granger, who has refused to stand down after a disputed election in March, which has locked the former British colony in a legal and political impasse. Last week the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, announced travel bans “against those undermining democracy”. He said the country was on “a non-democratic trajectory”.

7 BRAZIL



Soy and beef exports to EU from illegally cleared land

Large quantities of the soy and beef exported to Europe from Brazil have been “contaminated” by deforestation, research shows. The findings, published in the journal *Science*, suggest much more needs to be done to protect Brazilian land as pending trade agreements are likely to increase sales to European consumers.

About a fifth of the soy exported to the EU from the Amazon and Cerrado regions and at least 17% of the beef may be coming from land that has been deforested. Just 2% of properties in the regions of Brazil studied were responsible for 62% of the illegal deforestation.

9 PARAGUAY

Latest murder fuels anger over sexual abuse of girls

Human rights activists have led a wave of fierce public indignation after several cases of sexual violence and murder among young girls.

Last month, a 12-year-old indigenous girl was found killed with signs of sexual abuse in the Itapúa administrative department.

Activists said nowhere near enough was being done to protect indigenous children in particular.

10 SPORT



Rugby considers trans women ban over safety fear

World Rugby is considering banning trans women from playing women's rugby because of significant safety concerns that have emerged following research, a decision that would make it the first international sports federation to go down that path. A draft document produced by its transgender working group acknowledged there is likely to be "at least a 20-30% greater risk" of injury when a female player is tackled by someone who has gone through male puberty.

Global report

15 SAUDI ARABIA

**Oil giant agrees to carbon cuts to tackle climate crisis**

The world's biggest oil company, Saudi Aramco, has joined an alliance of oil companies to set the first industry-wide target to help tackle the climate crisis by setting carbon emissions goals.

Saudi Arabia's state oil giant has agreed to reduce the carbon intensity of its business as part of the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI) which includes Shell, BP and ExxonMobil.

The industry-funded alliance pledged to reduce the carbon intensity of production to between 20 and 21kg of carbon dioxide per barrel of crude by 2025, or 13% below 2017 levels.

Climate experts have warned fresh "intensity targets" are no replacement for a commitment to reduce carbon emissions by producing less oil and gas.

16 ZIMBABWE

Campaigning journalist seized from his home

Authorities arrested a prominent journalist known for his reporting on the country's endemic corruption in the latest in a series of abductions of government critics.

Hopewell Chin'ono was taken from his home in Harare on Monday by eight "state security agents" who broke windows to gain entry and did not produce any warrant, his lawyer said.

Chin'ono recently published documents that raised concerns that powerful individuals in Zimbabwe were profiting from multimillion-dollar deals for supplies to fight coronavirus.

17 RUSSIA

Plans to replace arrested governor despite unrest

The Kremlin is poised to replace a governor from Russia's far east charged with multiple murders, potentially kindling a fresh round of public anger that has already ignited the largest protests in the region's history.

As many as 50,000 people took to the streets last Saturday in Khabarovsk, a city almost 1,000km east of Moscow, to demand the return of Sergei Furgal, a former scrap metals trader charged with the murder of two business rivals and the attempted killing of a third in 2004-05.

So far, police have largely avoided cracking down on the unsanctioned rallies, which have attracted hundreds of supporters on weekdays and swelled to tens of thousands at weekends.

Vladimir Putin may name a new acting governor to the region soon, said Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, a nationalist politician who heads the rightwing Liberal Democratic party, a token opposition. Zhirinovskiy claimed in a radio appearance he had been promised the replacement would also be a member of his party, apparently as a concession.

18 CHINA

Xinjiang Covid-19 outbreak spreads to second city

A coronavirus outbreak in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang has spread to a second city, one day after authorities announced "wartime" anti-pandemic measures in a district of Urumqi city. On Monday, the national health commission reported 22 new cases, five of which were imported. One case was reported in the Silk Road city of Kashgar, in north-western Xinjiang, while the rest were in Urumqi.

At least 47 people diagnosed with Covid-19 in Xinjiang were in Urumqi. However, the Urumqi city government has not provided a public update since 15 July.

19 SOUTH AFRICA

Cecil Rhodes statue in Cape Town decapitated

Activists in South Africa beheaded a statue of the 19th-century British colonialist Cecil Rhodes, a diamond magnate who became wealthy through the labour of black miners and is infamous for his racist rule in southern Africa.

The statue in Cape Town is the latest to be targeted as part of a global reckoning over racial injustice sparked by the police killing of George Floyd in the US in May.

The statue's head had been missing its nose, which was gouged off previously by activists. "I cannot say exactly how many times the statue has been damaged but I can confirm that it is not the first time," said a spokeswoman for South Africa National Parks. Police opened a vandalism case.



DEATHS



John Lewis
Civil rights activist committed to non-violent protest for six decades and a fiercely independent Democratic congressman. He died on 17 July, aged 80.

A giant of American life
David Smith
Page 32 →

Cordy Tindell 'CT' Vivian
Civil rights activist who worked alongside Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He died on 17 July, aged 95.

Tony Elliott
Founder of the London listings magazine Time Out who replicated the formula in New York and other cities around the world. He died on 17 July, aged 73.

Judy Dyble
The first female singer with the English folk-rock pioneers Fairport Convention. She died on 12 July, aged 71.



ENVIRONMENT

Tyres contributing to tonnes of plastic particles in oceans

More than 200,000 tonnes of tiny plastic particles are blown from roads into the oceans every year, according to research.

The study suggests wind-borne microplastics are a bigger source of ocean pollution than rivers, the route that has attracted most attention to date. The analysis focused on the tiny particles produced by tyres and brake pads.

It estimated that 550,000 tonnes of particles smaller than 0.01mm are deposited each year, with almost half ending up in the ocean. More than 80,000 tonnes fall on remote ice- and snow-covered areas and may increase melting as the dark particles absorb the sun's heat.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Siberian heatwave most likely caused by humans

The record-breaking heatwave in the Siberian Arctic was made at least 600 times more likely by human-caused climate change, according to a study.

Between January and June, temperatures in the far north of Russia were more than 5C above average, causing permafrost to melt, buildings to collapse, and sparking an unusually early and intense start to the forest fires season. On 20 June, a monitoring station in Verkhoyansk registered a record high of 38C.

An attribution study shows such prolonged heat over the first six months of the year would have been almost impossible without the effect of greenhouse gas emissions from industry, transport and farming.

The team of researchers from international universities and meteorological services, including the PP Shirshov Institute of Oceanology in the Russian Academy of Science, calculated this human impact added at least 2C of warming.

ASTRONOMY

New images show sun is covered with 'campfires'

The closest ever images of the sun reveal its surface is speckled with "campfires", miniature versions of the solar flares visible from Earth.

The observations, beamed back from the Solar Orbiter spacecraft, which is a joint Nasa and European Space Agency (ESA) mission, could help resolve why the sun's atmosphere is so staggeringly hot compared to the surface.

The latest footage, taken at 77m kilometres above the solar surface between the orbits of Venus and Mercury, reveals flickering beacons, each spanning just a few hundred kilometres across and lasting minutes, before fizzling out again.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Farming and fossil fuels drive methane to record levels

Animal farming and fossil fuels have driven global emissions of the potent greenhouse gas methane to the highest level on record, putting the world on track for dangerously increased heat levels of 3C to 4C.

Since 2000 discharges of the gas have risen by more than 50m tonnes a year, equivalent to 350m cars, according to the latest Methane Budget study by a global team.

The findings, published in Earth System Science Data and Environmental Research Letters, show that more than half of the methane in the atmosphere now comes from human sources.

◀ An average tyre loses 4kg during its lifetime: 'a huge amount of plastic', according to Andreas Stohl, from the Norwegian Institute for Air Research

MARTIN GODWIN



84

The number of hotdogs it is possible to eat in 10 minutes, according to a study. Joey 'Jaws' Chestnut set the record at 75 this month at Nathan's Famous Hotdog Eating Contest

**Global report
United Kingdom**

MEDICINE

Government buys 90m doses of Covid-19 vaccines

The UK government is investing millions to secure two more experimental vaccines against Covid-19, increasing the chances of obtaining a vaccine that works for the population.

The agreement is to buy 90m doses of two vaccines, which would be enough to immunise frontline health workers and care staff, who will be the priority. The government is effectively hedging its bets - the two vaccines work in a different way from the Oxford vaccine, of which it has already bought 100m doses. It is also urging the public to sign up to take part in trials of Covid-19 vaccines, in the hope of having 500,000 people registered by October. The business secretary, Alok Sharma, said the UK had signed a deal to buy 30m doses of the mRNA vaccine being developed by the German company BioNTech alongside Pfizer.

The companies recently announced positive results from phase 1 trials, which show it is safe and produces an immune response - although with some side-effects at higher doses.

The other vaccine is being developed by the French company Valneva which, unlike Oxford and BioNTech, has not been viewed as one of the early frontrunners in vaccine research. The agreement is to buy 60m doses - in principle. If the vaccine is proven to be safe, effective and suitable, the UK has secured an option to acquire a further 40m doses.

"We can to ensure the British public get access to a safe and effective coronavirus vaccine as soon as possible," said Sharma.

Good news from Oxford page 18 →



Eyewitness**📺 The ice ball cometh**

Comet C/2020 F3 Neowise was only discovered on 27 March by the Nasa Neowise space telescope but the 5km-wide ball of ice, rock and dust has since become an astronomical celebrity across the northern hemisphere. Here it is over Stonehenge, south-west England on Monday; the comet is thought to have last appeared in our skies about 6,800 years ago – well over a millennium before construction is believed to have begun on the neolithic monument.

JAVIER GARCIA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

**ECONOMY****Beefeaters leave the Tower as pandemic cuts bite**

The famous Beefeaters at the Tower of London are among staff at six palaces in London and Northern Ireland threatened by redundancies as the coronavirus pandemic hits visitor numbers.

Historic Royal Palaces, the charity that looks after the palaces, faces a drop in revenues from £110m to £12m (\$114m-\$15m) this year, and it expects visitor numbers to take years to recover to 2019 levels.

It is thought to be the first time since the yeoman warders, the ceremonial guardians of the tower popularly known as Beefeaters, who were formed under Henry VII in 1485, have faced the threat of compulsory redundancy. It is understood that two Beefeaters have so far opted to take voluntary redundancy, but further cuts are possible. There are about 800 visitors to the Tower a day, compared with as many as 15,000 at busy times in previous years. The Tower has capacity for 1,000 visitors with social distancing.

CONSERVATION**Reintroduced red kites are a 30-year success story**

Thirty years after 13 red kites were flown in from Spain to the Chilterns in southern England, there are nearly 2,000 breeding pairs across virtually every English county, in what has been hailed as one of the most successful reintroduction projects in the world.

Tony Juniper, chair of Natural England, the government's conservation watchdog, said there was "pretty strong momentum" for other reintroductions. Last year, five white-tailed eagles were placed on the Isle of Wight following a successful reintroduction to Scotland, and there are ongoing projects to return beavers and white storks.

**SOCIETY****Boys with big plans open gender pay gap at age 15**

The gender pay gap may be partly explained by teenage boys having more ambitious aims to attend prestigious universities than girls, even if they have the same academic results, according to research.

The study of school pupils in England conducted by academics at University College London's Institute of Education found "clear evidence" boys already had more advanced plans for higher education than girls at the age of 15, with more boys aiming to apply to Oxford, Cambridge or other more selective universities, regardless of background or school attended.

Nikki Shure, one of the co-authors of the research, said that ambition often translated into more lucrative careers, which may help explain the gender pay gap: "The goal of this paper is not just to tell girls to be more ambitious, but to get young people to think about making concrete, specific university plans."

10%
The proportion of the adult population working for online platforms such as Uber and Deliveroo at least once a week, according to a Trades Union Congress study

**'Conservative backbenchers
flex their muscles'**
China sceptics speak up [Page 12](#) →

**'Britain is trapped in US-China
economic power play'**
Analysis [Page 12](#) →

**'TikTok is no longer seen
as simple fun'**
An app in the crossfire [Page 14](#) →

Point break



📍 A Hong Kong
protester. Britain
has banned the
export of riot
police equipment
to Hong Kong

ANTHONY WALLACE/GETTY

By Peter Walker



While Raab's decisions were

***Britain has already
promised up to 3m
Hong Kong residents a
path to citizenship***



LEON NEAL/GETTY



PETER WALKER IS A POLITICAL
CORRESPONDENT FOR THE GUARDIAN



Tory MPs flex their muscles on China

By Dan Sabbagh

Mike Pompeo was due to meet a group of Conservative backbench MPs on Tuesday who have been pressing for the UK to take a harder line on China, and it was not for a victory lap as some in Downing Street might have hoped.

The hawkish US secretary of state wants to encourage the Conservative rebels to keep pushing for Britain to go further than banning Huawei from 5G phone networks and suspending the extradition treaty with Hong Kong. Not that they need encouragement.

There is no shortage of Tory backbenchers who want further diplomatic and economic restrictions on Beijing, a cause espoused so keenly by former Brexiters such as David Davis and more centrist MPs such as Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the foreign affairs committee, that they sometimes compete among themselves.

"There are multiple issues we need to push ahead with as part of a general China reassessment and we are keen that the government continues to move," said Bob Seely, who helped organise a bloc of 50 MPs in a campaign to demand that Huawei be blocked from future 5G networks.

Top of the list are calls for China to be barred from involvement in building nuclear power stations, whether as a minority investor in Hinkley Point, in Somerset, or as a prime contractor, as in the case of a proposed project at Bradwell in Essex.

Others want a review of Beijing's impact on UK higher education. More than 120,000 Chinese students attend British universities, making a critical contribution to their funding, but there remains concern about China's involvement in UK research in areas such as facial recognition and cryptography.

The climate is changing



▲ China's role in UK nuclear power is a concern

◀ US secretary of state Mike Pompeo

ANDREW HARNIK/AFP/GETTY

so fast that Iain Duncan Smith, a former Tory party leader, even called on Monday for a ban on TikTok, the popular video sharing app, "because of its proximity to Chinese intelligence services" – a point that defenders of the company have argued makes little sense given it is a home for "short, homemade videos".

But it is hard to escape the conviction that China policy is being driven by the Conservative backbenchers – many looking for a grand cause after winning the Brexit argument – in alliance with an aggressive, trade-obsessed White House.

The hawks' position has been helped by the crisis in Hong Kong, where China's decision to impose a draconian national security law and in effect end the "one country, two systems" model has helped ensure there is opposition support for a tougher line.

In the Commons on Monday, Lisa Nandy, the shadow foreign secretary, was quick to support her opposite number, Dominic Raab, when he announced the suspension of the extradition treaty. "This must mark the start of a more strategic approach to China based on an ethical approach to foreign policy," she said.

There is more to come, and there are predictions of a decoupling between the west and China as countries such as the UK are forced to choose between a US-led bloc and a far eastern one, although there would be economic costs in doing so.

DAN SABBAGH IS THE GUARDIAN'S DEFENCE AND SECURITY EDITOR

ANALYSIS
UNITED KINGDOM

In a hole... Can post-Brexit Britain rebuild its position on the world stage?

By Simon Tisdall



Life after divorce can be difficult. Having cut ties with the EU, its partner of 47 years, Britain's new-minted relationship with China is in deep water. Tapping into Beijing's enormous economic power is vital to Brexit's success. But the relationship has soured.

Harsh words are flying. Boris Johnson is accused of two-timing China by succumbing to US pressure to break it off and backing Donald Trump's electorally driven "new cold war". Johnson would surely rather have it both ways. But he knows a show of defiance could wreck his other Brexit passion: a new trade deal with the US.

What to do? Caught in this triangle, senior government officials are hedging their bets. On the face of it, they satisfied an importunate US last week by banning the Chinese firm Huawei from doing business in Britain. But as the Observer reported last weekend, they have also privately indicated to Huawei that "geopolitics" is to blame and the decision may be reversible.

What does this mean? It means that while collecting US brownie points, Britain is simultaneously telling the Chinese, sotto voce, that Trump is the problem. If Joe Biden replaces him in January, it's suggested, Britain would anticipate greater flexibility – and a possible return to business as usual.

Those claiming Brexit is "done" ignore such ongoing strategic ramifications in an era of shifting power balances. Brexit's big idea

was that “global Britain” could chart its own buccaneering course, trading freely with the world. Yet the emerging picture is of a diplomatically isolated, vulnerable country juggling the conflicting demands of bigger players.

It could be argued the UK’s timing has been unlucky. The 2016 Brexit referendum and ensuing debate coincided with the unexpected advent of Trump and his xenophobic, divisive brand of “America First” nationalism – and to some extent echoed it.

Trump can be seen as an aberration. But his policies have undermined, perhaps permanently, the international rules-based political, economic and security order that Britain helped create and over which it has exerted disproportionate influence since 1945. Trump’s disdain for shared western democratic values, alliances and laws has been deeply destabilising for the UK’s traditional worldview. This has placed US reliability in doubt and raised profound questions about the “special relationship” – Britain’s geopolitical bedrock.

At the same time Xi Jinping, who effectively awarded himself power for life in 2018, was moving China away from the “peaceful rise” stratagems of his predecessors. Instead, he espoused an expansionist, more assertive international posture. Xi would probably have made the shift sooner or later. But it seems to have been accelerated by Trump’s 2017 designation of China as a “strategic competitor” and “economic aggressor”. As rivalry intensified, Xi unleashed a fierce counter-offensive by so-called wolf warrior diplomats tasked with robustly projecting Chinese power.

Two recent developments – Xi’s security crackdown in Hong Kong and the culmination of US pressure on its allies to boycott Huawei – have plunged Britain into the centre of this geopolitical maelstrom. Yet its Janusian dilemma is not simply the product of bad luck. Problematic British economic and technological dependence on China is not a new phenomenon. But it is one that was long ignored out of political

expediency and shortsightedness. Tory Brexiters who now portray Chinese companies as a dire security risk are the same people who, when it suited them, painted a cosy picture of lucrative collaboration.

Tories thought they were being clever by wooing Xi with a 2015 state visit and talk of a golden era. But David Cameron and George Osborne were geopolitical amateurs. Now, predictably, it’s gone pear-shaped.

What’s left is a post-Brexit UK global strategy that largely boils down to a risky gamble on expanding relationships with two superpowers that don’t rate or respect Britain and that are fiercely at odds with each other.

How does Britain get out of this hole? There is hope, if only

**“
Britain’s escape from
diplomatic purdah may
be assisted by changes
in US-China dynamic**

because geopolitical calculations are constantly changing. Future trends are not all negative. And in terms of the specific Huawei and Hong Kong problems, still being a member of the EU would not have helped much. Brussels has huffed and puffed about China’s disregard for international norms. But unlike Australia, no EU member state has yet joined Britain in extending a visa lifeline to Hong Kong citizens fleeing Beijing’s chokehold.

As for Huawei, there is no common EU position and no solidarity. The company claims to have lined up telecoms deals in numerous European countries. Some governments are reportedly waiting for Germany to make its decision, due in September. But chancellor Angela Merkel, attuned to Germany’s vast export trade with China, seems unlikely to exclude Huawei. In fact, she still hopes to convene a Covid-delayed EU-China summit within the coming year.

Nor, if it can help it, will the EU take sides in the US-China brawl. Some states are already in bed with

**The UK is
friendless**
Opinion
Page 47 →

▼ Boris Johnson is accused of two-timing China by succumbing to US pressure

GUARDIAN DESIGN



Beijing economically while others, though critical, are no friends of Trump's policy of belligerence.

All is not lost in Europe. There is no bar to Britain working cooperatively with individual European states on specific policy issues. There is talk, too, of forming a new grouping of 10 leading democracies, the D-10, a possible replacement for the discredited G-7.

Britain's escape from diplomatic purdah may also be assisted by future changes in the US-China dynamic. A case can be made that Xi has overplayed his hand of late and may be forced to recalibrate. Trump's accusations over the origin and handling of the pandemic are but part of a larger battle. Rows with Australia over an international Covid-19 inquiry, with Canada over alleged hostage-taking, with India over a disputed Himalayan border, with Vietnam and the Philippines over maritime rights, and now with Taiwan and Hong Kong have created an impression of China versus the world. Its reputation has suffered.

When the economic impact of the pandemic, the market-roiling US-China trade standoff and strident western criticism about human rights abuses are factored in, it's not hard to imagine Xi quietly rowing back a little - which would potentially benefit Britain.

Likewise, Washington's predatory behaviour towards friends and allies may also change dramatically if Joe Biden wins in November. The Democrat has been more sharply critical of Beijing of late.

Yet Biden's whole approach to foreign relations is summed up by the term "strategic empathy". He has spent decades as a senator and vice-president building bridges, not burning them. He knows China well. As some in Whitehall and Westminster seem to hope, his election could improve the geopolitical climate overnight.

With a new president in the White House, there would still be tensions with Beijing. But talk of cold war would be likely to recede rapidly. Biden is an old hand. And he believes in win-win outcomes. That's something the conflicted Johnson could learn from. **Observer**

SIMON TISDALL IS AN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR FOR THE GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER

TIKTOK

How the hit video app became a flashpoint

By Alex Hern

At first glance, TikTok is an unusual geopolitical flashpoint. The app, which offers creators a set of tools which make producing video fun and easy and in turn provides viewers with an endless stream of entertaining sub-minute clips, has more than half a billion users, with the majority aged under 30.

It is owned by a Chinese company, ByteDance, but unlike peers such as Huawei and ZTC, it has little to do with critical national infrastructure, and has so far avoided the accusations of intellectual property theft and state aid which are often the first step to sanctions. If anything, with Facebook this week launching a pitch-perfect TikTok clone, Reels, the company can make a case that it is a genuine innovator, oft-followed, never beaten.

But try as it might, TikTok cannot escape its past. The app was born in China as Douyin, ByteDance's second viral success after a news

aggregator, Toutiao, took the country by storm in 2017. But when the company failed to export Toutiao overseas, marketing it to westerners as TopBuzz, it looked set to join a long list of Chinese web firms that failed to thrive beyond the Great Firewall.

With TikTok, ByteDance took a different approach, buying out the already-popular Musical.ly, another Chinese app that had gathered a critical mass of users in the west. The company rebranded Musical.ly as TikTok, and spent nearly \$1bn on app install adverts across the US to boost its growth still further.

In the process, it attracted a fair amount of criticism, eventually agreeing to settle with the US Federal Trade Commission over allegations that it was cavalier with regards to children's personal data.

But in the summer of 2019, the app began to come under additional scrutiny because of its Chinese origins. As the Hong Kong protests bloomed, users noticed content celebrating the cause was nearly absent on the app; a bizarre omission, given the overlap in the youthful demographics of both.

Last September, the Guardian received documents that confirmed what many had suspected: the app's moderation team had been explicitly instructed to remove content covering topics Beijing would rather not be discussed, including Tiananmen Square, Falun Gong and Taiwan. TikTok said the guidelines had been retired that May, and future versions would be written by the local teams in each country.

This summer as China's

international standing has deteriorated further due to its actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, TikTok's dominance looks increasingly dangerous to US and UK legislators.

One set of fears revolve around the app's potential for harvesting user data. TikTok does not know much about its users, particularly compared with a fully-featured social network such as Facebook, and the company has always maintained that user data is not stored in China but in data centres in the US, Singapore and elsewhere around the world.

Nonetheless, observers fear that ByteDance, like all Chinese companies, has little ability to stand up to the state if it does demand access. The company already had to make a public apology to state censors in 2017, after the Cyberspace Administration of China came down on it for "disseminating pornographic and vulgar information" through Toutiao, sparking little faith that it would resist a more forceful intervention.

The other set of fears go back to the moderation guidelines - and further. TikTok's most powerful feature is the For You page, an algorithmically curated feed of videos that most users never need click away from. Like all curation algorithms, the exact way the app picks what to show users is shrouded in mystery. That has caused alarm among those who have observed the Chinese state's increasing desire to control conversation not just at home, but abroad as well.

ALEX HERN IS THE GUARDIAN'S UK TECHNOLOGY EDITOR





In-depth reporting and analysis

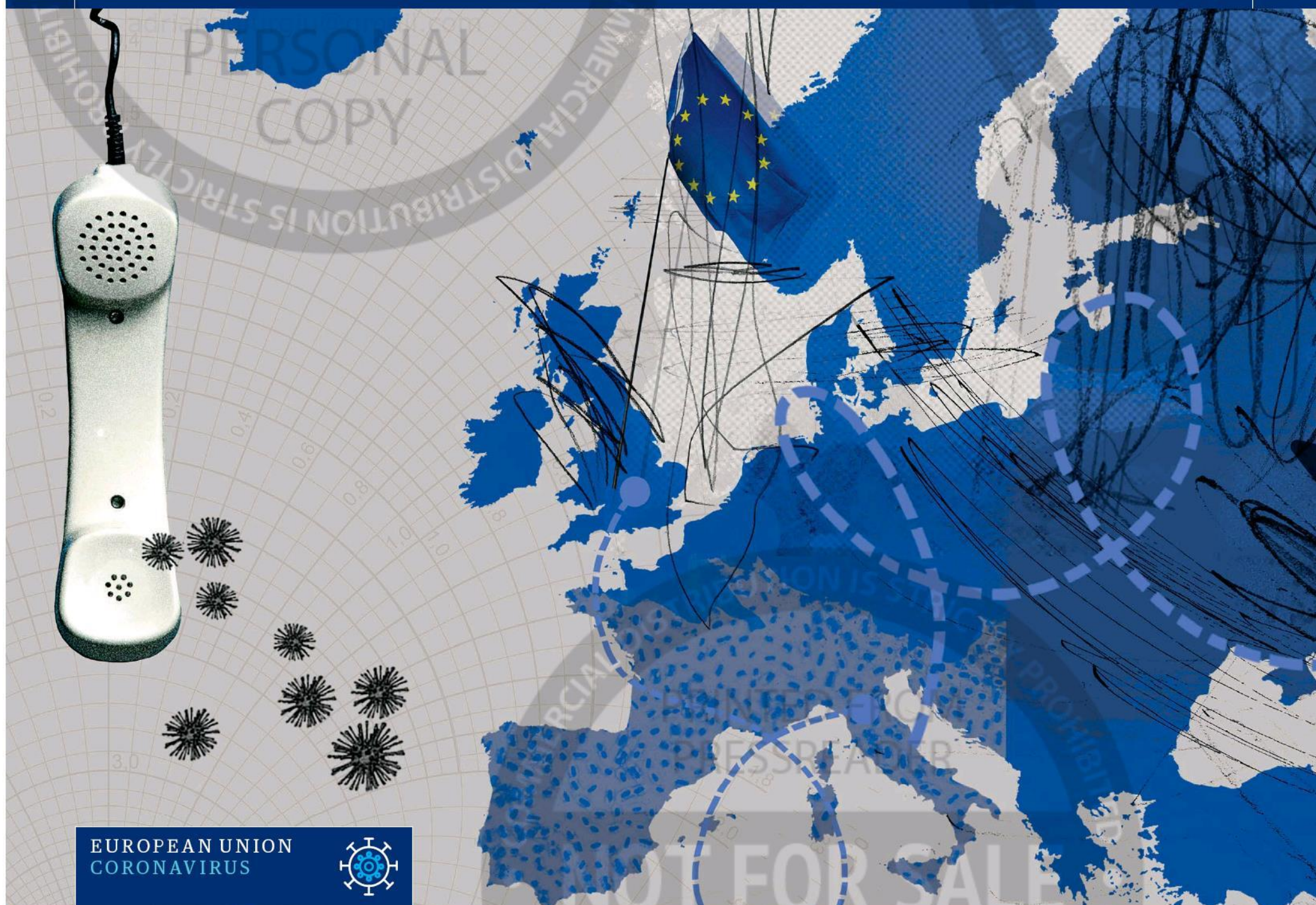
15

JAPAN

Has Tokyo got
Olympic fatigue
already?

Page 21 →

Spotlight



EUROPEAN UNION
CORONAVIRUS



Special report The looming pandemic
demanded a united European response.
So how did things go quite so wrong?

Illustrations by
ELEANOR
SHAKESPEARE

By Daniel Boffey, Celine Schoen, Ben Stockton and Laura Margottini



pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW



Spotlight Coronavirus



It was a moment of chilling clarity. On 26 February, with the numbers of Italians known to be infected by coronavirus tripling every 48 hours, the country's prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, appealed to fellow EU member states for help.

Hospitals were overwhelmed. Italian doctors and nurses had run out of masks, gloves and aprons and medics were forced to play God with the lives of the critically ill because of an acute lack of ventilators.

An urgent message relaying Italy's needs was sent to the EU's Common Emergency Communication and Information System via the European commission. It was met with silence. "No member state responded to Italy's request and to the commission's call for help," said Janez Lenarčič, the commissioner responsible for crisis management. "Which meant not only is Italy is not prepared ... Nobody is prepared ... [It] was not so much a lack of solidarity. It was a lack of equipment."

More than 180,000 European citizens, across the European economic area and the UK, are recorded as having died with coronavirus. The true number is almost certainly higher. Leaders have been asked fundamental

questions about the purpose of the EU if it fails to come together at the darkest times.

Here, through analysis and interviews, the Guardian and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism tell the story of how Europe became the World Health Organization-designated "epicentre" of a global pandemic - and what key lessons might be learned.

It was as millions of Europeans prepared for New Year's Eve that officials in the Stockholm office of the EU public health agency, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), received notice of a cluster of pneumonia cases in China of unknown origin.

The ECDC offers scientific advice, but responsibility for health remains with EU national governments. The ECDC's job is to call the alarm, whether capitals listen or not.

The agency gave its first threat assessment on 9 January, the body's director, Dr Andrea Ammon, recalled. "Roughly two weeks later, it turned out it is human-to-human transmission, which changes what you need to do."

On 17 January, a coronavirus conference call was held by another EU body, the commission's health security committee. But just 12 of the 27 member states, plus the UK, phoned in.

Wolfgang Philipp, the head of the European commission's health department, chaired the meeting. He told those present that a few dozen people in Wuhan had been infected with a new strain of coronavirus. Up to 300,000 people were expected to travel to Europe from China that month, many to celebrate Chinese new year on 25 January.

The committee recommended targeting passengers on the 12 weekly flights arriving in Europe from Wuhan. The UK and France shared information about what they were doing at airports. But there was no update from Italy, one of the many absentees.

The committee had planned to release recommendations on border measures. But those who did attend could not agree. It was an ominous sign of the difficulties the commission would face.

At the helm of the commission was Ursula von der Leyen, just a few weeks into her job as president. The pandemic was a crisis that could have been tailor-made for Von der Leyen, a medical doctor before entering politics. However, her first steps were said by some to be tentative. She appeared unsure of the levers she had at her disposal. "The commission should have taken a grip earlier,"

12

Just 12 of the EU member states - plus the UK - joined the first coronavirus conference call

12

The number of weekly flights that normally arrive in Europe from Wuhan, China

CORONAVIRUS



A marathon meeting leads to an EU recovery deal, finally

By Daniel Boffey and
Jennifer Rankin BRUSSELS

EU leaders reached a historic agreement on Tuesday morning on a €750bn (\$858bn) coronavirus pandemic recovery fund and their long-term spending plans following days of acrimonious debate at the bloc's longest summit in nearly two decades.

As the meeting reached its fifth day, the 27 exhausted heads of state and government finally gave their seal of approval to a plan for the EU to jointly borrow debt to be disbursed through grants on an unprecedented scale, in the face of an economic downturn not seen since the Great Depression.

The end of the tortuous process was announced by the European

council president, Charles Michel, who had been chairing the leaders' long debates, with a single word on Twitter: "Deal!"

France's president, Emmanuel Macron, described it as a "historic day for Europe".

Ursula von der Leyen, the European commission president, said that the more than 90 hours of negotiations had been "worth it" and that the EU could not be accused this time of doing "too little, too late".

Negotiations for the hard-won deal pitted north against south and east against west as governments haggled over the terms of both the bloc's seven-year budget and a one-off economic stimulus.

Despite initial opposition from the so-called frugal states of the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and Denmark, agreement was finally found, following a final 5.15am session of the 27 on Tuesday morning, to disburse vast sums in the form of non-repayable grants to countries most stricken by the coronavirus pandemic.

The breakthrough followed a new proposal from Michel for the EU to pay out €390bn in grants and €360bn in loans from the new economic reconstruction fund.

The "frugal" states had been pushing for the original proposal by the European commission for €500bn in grants to be reduced to €350bn, to the evident frustration of Macron and the German chancellor, Angela Merkel.

Italy's prime minister, Giuseppe

European council president Charles Michel

XINHUA/REX/
SHUTTERSTOCK

Big money
Europe opens
its coffers

1.07tn

Size, in euros, of
EU's seven-year
budget proposed
by 27 states

390bn

Total, in euros,
of grants to
be paid from
reconstruction
fund

Conte, had at one stage warned his Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte, who led the way on reducing the level of grants, that he might become a hero at home but that he faced being blamed by the rest of Europe for his lack of solidarity.

But Michel's new formulation, emerging out of hours of bilateral talks with the leaders on both sides of the debate outside of the full plenary sessions of the leaders, finally received the unanimous support it required.

"This recovery fund is indeed a historic change and a historic step for Europe," said Macron, in a joint press conference with Merkel.

The final outcome is a messy bundle of compromises. As part of the deal, the "frugals" will receive significant increases in the rebates they receive on their budget contributions, a throwback from 1984 when Margaret Thatcher secured discounts on the UK's outsized budget contributions.

Merkel said the British departure had changed the balance among the remaining 27 members and created a new dynamic.

Michel also watered down his initial proposal for holding up the disbursement of funds both where there are concerns over either a lack of promised economic reform or the state of the rule of law in a country.

Where there are fears that reforms are not being implemented by member states in receipt of money, any one EU leader can halt the disbursement of money to allow the European council of the 27 heads of state and government to "exhaustively" debate the situation.

On the rule of law, France, Germany and other countries had wanted a link to EU funds but Hungary and Poland's governments, who have been previously accused of undermining judicial independence and minority rights, rejected this plan.

The compromise agreed by the leaders instead puts off designing a rule of law mechanism for another day with agreement to be made by a qualified majority of member states.

The Brussels summit, the first in-person meeting of the leaders for five months, was just a few minutes shorter than the record-holding meeting in Nice 20 years ago when leaders debated EU enlargement.

DANIEL BOFFEY IS THE GUARDIAN'S BRUSSELS BUREAU CHIEF; JENNIFER RANKIN IS BRUSSELS CORRESPONDENT





UNITED KINGDOM



▲ Trial samples are handled at the Oxford Vaccine Group lab. The vaccine has been shown to produce an immune response

JOHN CAIRNS

'A milestone' - Oxford's vaccine sees hopes rise

By Sarah Boseley

Oxford University's experimental coronavirus vaccine is safe and generated a strong immune response in about 1,000 people who volunteered to help trial it, researchers said on Monday, raising hopes it could help end the pandemic.

The results published in the Lancet medical journal are preliminary, with the effect of the vaccine measured by the amount of antibodies and T-cells it generates in the blood of the volunteers - not in any response to the virus itself.

Large-scale trials have begun in Brazil and South Africa, however, where infection rates are still high and it will be possible to assess whether vaccinated individuals are less likely to get Covid-19 than others.

The results were "a really important milestone" on the path to a vaccine, said the study's lead author, Prof Andrew Pollard. They showed that the vaccine was very well tolerated by more than 1,000 volunteers. "We are seeing exactly the sort of immune responses we were hoping for, including neutralising antibodies and T-cell responses, which, at least from what we've seen in the animal studies seem to be those that are associated with protection."



'We are seeing exactly the immune responses we were hoping for'

Prof Andrew Pollard

The problem is, he said, "we just don't know what level is needed if you meet this virus in the wild, to provide protection, so we need to do the clinical trials and to work that out."

Hopefully they will find out from the trials to come what level of immune response is needed, which would help all vaccine developers.

"We don't know what high is. We've got immune responses that we can measure, we can see the virus being neutralised when the antibodies are tested in the laboratory, but we don't know how much is needed. I mean it's encouraging but it's only the first milestone on this long path," he said.

Ideally the vaccine would protect against any infection, but scientists already accept it may reduce the severity of the disease instead, meaning people would be less likely to become very sick and die.

The volunteers have been followed up for eight weeks so far after immunisation. A further question is how long any immune response will last - maybe for six months or a year or even longer. There are also questions over whether it will work in older adults - flu vaccinations do not give as much protection to older people, whose immune systems function less well than younger people's.

"The immune system has two ways of finding and attacking pathogens - antibody and T-cell responses. This vaccine is intended to induce both, so it can attack the virus when it's circulating in the body, as well as attacking infected cells," said Pollard.

"We hope this means the immune system will remember the virus, so that our vaccine will protect people for an extended period. However, we need more research before we can confirm the vaccine effectively protects against Sars-CoV-2 infection, and for how long any protection lasts."

The UK government's health secretary Matt Hancock said: "A safe and effective vaccine is our best hope of defeating coronavirus and returning to life as normal."

"We have some of our best scientists and researchers working on this, but members of the public have a vital role to play too. So I urge everyone who can to back the national effort and sign up to the NHS Covid-19 vaccine research registry to help find a vaccine as soon as possible."

SARAH BOSELEY IS THE GUARDIAN'S HEALTH EDITOR

MEDICINE

Trial shows new inhalant drug cuts mortality risk

Trials of an experimental drug have found a significant reduction in hospital patients with Covid-19 needing to be put on a ventilator or dying from the disease, according to researchers.

The drug, called SNG001, is delivered via an inhaler and is based on interferon beta, a protein produced naturally that plays a key role in coordinating the body's antiviral response.

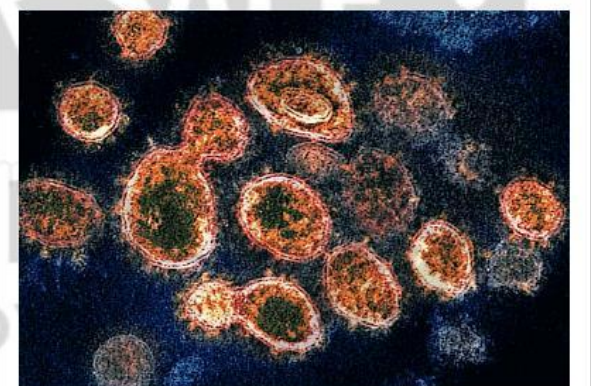
Researchers have announced the results of an initial trial, which found the odds of Covid-19 patients not needing ventilation, or dying, while being treated in hospital were 79% better among those given SNG001 compared with those given a placebo.

The team behind the trial say those given the drug were just over twice as likely to show "no limitation of activities" or "no clinical or virological evidence of infection" during the 16-day study period, so the chance of recovery was boosted.

Tom Wilkinson, a professor of respiratory medicine at the University of Southampton and the trial's chief investigator, said: "The initial results are very positive and provide a strong platform to take this drug forward in clinical development, working closely with an international regulatory framework to try and get this drug into patient care as soon as is possible."

However some experts urged caution. "This trial is too small to draw firm conclusions. The headline reduction in progression to severe disease comes with huge statistical uncertainty," said Martin Landray, a professor of medicine and epidemiology at the University of Oxford.

SNG001 is produced by the Southampton-based biotech firm Synairgen. Nicola Davis





TRAVEL



In Europe's hotspots, a search for a new way to do tourism

By Stephen Burgen BARCELONA and
Angela Giuffrida ROME

Barely a year ago the graffiti on the walls of Barcelona read Tourists Go Home. Now that they have gone, the city – along with others that are heavily dependent on the tourist trade – fears economic collapse and is hastily drawing up plans to lure visitors back while placating tourist-weary residents.

Trade associations predict at least 15% of businesses and one in four restaurants in Barcelona city centre

will close permanently as a result of coronavirus and the outlook is similarly grim in other urban tourist destinations, with tens of thousands of jobs at risk.

But Covid-19 has got the mayors of some of Europe's most heavily visited cities, academics and urban scholars all singing the same tune: the collapse of the travel industry caused by the virus offers a unique opportunity for cities plagued by mass tourism to rethink their business model.

Barbora Hrubá, of the Prague tourist agency, said the Czech capital wants a “different type of visitor”. Xavier Marcé, the Barcelona councillor responsible for tourism, said: “I don't want more tourists, I want more visitors.” “We're a city in crisis and are trying to do something different,” said Paola Mar, his counterpart in Venice.

“We want to have a sustainable visitor economy that doesn't harm the liveability of our city,” said Heleen Jansen, corporate communications coordinator at amsterdam&partners, a non-profit organisation that advises Amsterdam on how to market itself.

However, good intentions are one thing, concrete proposals another. According to Janet Sanz, Barcelona's deputy mayor, cities that have grown dependent on tourism are paying the

▲ Venetians enjoy the empty city, but fear unemployment
ANDREA PATTARO/AFP/GETTY

▼ Empty restaurants in Barcelona. One in four city centre restaurants in the city will close because of the pandemic
CESC MAYMO/GETTY



price and now the challenge is how to diversify.

It is easier said than done with the scale of tourism: Barcelona, which has a population of 1.6 million, received 30 million visitors in 2019; Venice, 270,000 residents, 25 million visitors; Amsterdam, population 873,000, welcomed 19 million tourists.

In Venice, mass tourism has in recent years been seen as a threat to the city's survival, but now the debate has switched to how it will pull through with fewer visitors.

While tourists have been trickling back to the city since the coronavirus lockdown was eased, the majority travelling by car from Austria, Germany, France and Belgium, many hotels remain closed and those that are open are only about 30% full.

“This is a time for reflection,” said Mar. While the city is yet to devise any bold measures to manage tourism better, some smaller changes are afoot.

“Owners of property that was rented to tourists have signed an agreement with the council and Venice's universities to now rent to students,” said Mar. “It's a good sign.”

Other cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona and Lisbon, have taken steps to curb the Airbnb phenomenon that has pushed up rents and driven residents out.

Jaime Palomera, spokesman for Barcelona's Tenants' Union, wants the thousands of tourist apartment licences that were granted in perpetuity by the Catalan government in 2011 to be revoked. He also says the government should legislate against letting single rooms to tourists, a loophole that allows landlords to get around the law banning renting out entire apartments.

As in Barcelona, much of Venetians' antipathy towards tourists has focused

In the lion's den – Kenya's female rangers

Her black boots brushing through yellow-brown bush, 24-year-old Purity Amleset is feeling tense. But fear is just part of the job, she says, as she patrols her section of the 147,000-hectare community land around Kenya's Amboseli National Park, a Unesco-designated biosphere reserve.

Amleset is one of eight rangers in the all-female International Fund for Animal Welfare's Team Lioness, a patrol unit among 76 rangers from the local Maa community. Their job is to protect wildlife from poaching and human-wildlife conflict.

Amleset has not seen her family since the first case of coronavirus in Kenya in March.

"I risk my life to spare their life [wildlife]," said Amleset, who is on a regular 20km patrol to visit the local community, recording GPS coordinates of wildlife sightings, as well as threats like snares or any suspicious activity.

"I grew up here with wildlife as our friends. We are thriving together. The water point, we share together with wildlife. The grass we use to herd the cattle, [we] herd together with wildlife," she said.

The Covid-19 pandemic has

decimated tourism and left donor-funded wildlife conservation hanging in the balance. In neighbouring Tanzania, many rangers have lost their jobs as tourism has dwindled, putting more pressure on Team Lioness and other community rangers. There are fears that fewer rangers could prompt a spike in poaching, threatening the ecosystem and future tourism.

"For us now the job has increased," said 20-year-old Sharon Nankinyi, speaking before a phased reopening in Kenya. "The most difficult thing is dangerous animals. If you meet them in the bush, they can attack you. But we know that without wildlife, people will not survive, and without people, wildlife will not survive.

"Before, women were not employed in this job because they said ... 'a woman cannot walk long distances in harsh climates'. But after we were employed ... our community realised that we can make it ... we can walk long distances, we can run - we usually go on a morning run and after that we compete with men.

"They think that we can't be in these dangerous places, we can't be in the bush, they think we just spend our time in town. So ... we can make it, we can do the hardest job and we stand on our own," said Nankinyi.

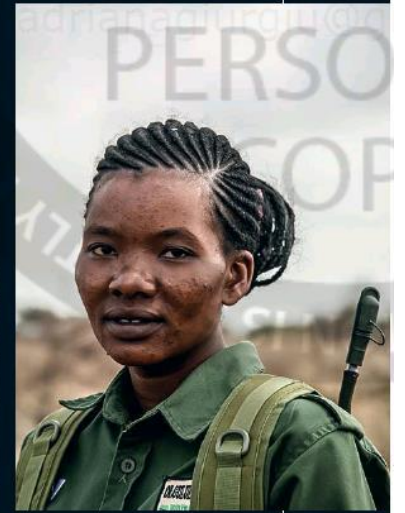
Words and photographs by Georgina Smith



▲ Sharon Nankinyi, centre, takes GPS coordinates of animal sightings on patrol



▼ **Rangers Purity Amleset and Eunice Mantei**



A woman in a red and blue patterned shawl and multiple necklaces, looking distressed, surrounded by people in a rural setting.

24 July 2020 **The Guardian Weekly**

SUDAN

'A glorious revolution' Joy in Sudan at liberal reforms

By Kaamil Ahmed

Sudan's transitional government has been praised for its latest reforms, which decriminalise apostasy, ban female genital mutilation (FGM) and end the requirement for women to get travel permits.

The legislation makes major strides in pushing back against discrimination faced by women and minorities during the 30-year rule of Omar al-Bashir that came to an end in 2019, according to equality advocates.

The anti-torture charity Redress and the Sudan-based African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies said the measures "move Sudan a step closer towards eliminating structural violence against women and minorities".

Justice minister Nasredeen Abdulbari announced earlier this month that apostasy, which had been used against religious minorities and was

punishable by death, would no longer be an offence. In addition, he said, non-Muslims will be allowed to drink alcohol in private.

Abdulbari called the reforms "a big stride towards establishing one of the foundations for the victorious December revolution's slogans, which is freedom".

Sudan's infamous apostasy laws were highlighted by the case of Meriam Ibrahim, who was raised by a Christian mother, but sentenced to death by a Sudanese court for abandoning Islam, the faith of her father. Ibrahim was freed in 2018 after an international outcry.

The reforms follow the abolition in late 2019 of the notorious Public Order Act. Article 152 of the law included the punishment of 40 lashes for women who wore trousers in public.

"How many women were abused by these unjust and humiliating laws ... thank you, our glorious revolution," wrote Ihsan Fagiri, head of the No to Oppression Against Women Initiative.

Fagiri had previously claimed that 45,000 women were prosecuted under the Public Order Act in 2016 alone.

Ola Diab, editor of the online Sudanese cultural magazine 500 Words, said the reforms were "great first steps".

"The issue here is implementation of these laws. I think that's where the challenge will be and where we'll see if these laws will really bring serious change," said Diab, noting that she expected social resistance to reforms such as the ban on FGM.

KAAMIL AHMED IS A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT FOR AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

ETHIOPIA



Tension on the Blue Nile as a hydro dam rises up

Ethiopia has allowed a controversial dam built across the headwaters of the Nile to fill with rain water, raising tensions with Egypt and Sudan.

The huge hydroelectric project on the Blue Nile, known as the Grand Renaissance dam, is at the centre of Ethiopia's plan to become Africa's biggest power exporter, but Egypt fears already limited Nile waters, on which its population of more than 100 million people depends, might be restricted.

"The construction of the dam and the filling of the water go hand in hand," Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia's water minister, said last week.

He denied that Ethiopia had decided to begin the process of filling the dam, but confirmed analysis of recent satellite images that showed the reservoir swelling.

Egypt's foreign minister, Sameh Shoukry, told the Alghad TV channel days that any "significant harm" to Egypt's water security by the dam constituted "a red line". He said Egyptian authorities would react "firmly", as "significant harm is illegitimate under international law".

Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt have spent a decade negotiating a deal to regulate the flow of water from the \$4.5bn mega-project, with talks intensifying in recent months as the end of construction work approached.

The dam blocks the river as it runs from Lake Tana in Ethiopia to meet the White Nile in Khartoum, before flowing north into Egypt. It will take several years for the reservoir to fill.

Sudan is less worried than Egypt, and hopes to gain access to cheap electricity that would provide a welcome boost for the country's troubled economy.

Jason Burke and Ruth Michaelson

Street fight Sudan's calls for change

Sudanese activists are demanding that a Khartoum street named after slave trader Al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur be renamed.

The road leads to the military headquarters where last year's peaceful protest against then-president Omar al-Bashir was dispersed violently and more than 120 people killed.

Hafiz Ibrahim, of Justice Africa, said: "We demand an apology from the grandchildren of those who opposed the abolition of slavery in Sudan."

Women in Khartoum, Sudan, campaign for reform

ASHRAF SHAZLY/
AFP/GETTY



ARGENTINA



Lockdown fatigue and a fresh spike ends a fragile truce

By Uki Goñi BUENOS AIRES

Until recently, Argentina's protracted coronavirus lockdown was marked by an unusual degree of harmony, as the country's perennially squabbling political factions came together to contain the spread of Covid-19.

But after nearly four months of consecutive lockdowns, rifts have begun to appear in that uneasy truce amid growing demands for a relaxation of quarantine measures. With new cases spiralling out of control, the old political rivalries between followers and detractors of the late three-time president Juan Perón, and his wife Evita, have returned to the fore.

On one side, the Perónist administration of the president, Alberto Fernández, is struggling to keep its coronavirus lockdown in place after Argentina passed the 100,000 cases this month – a four-fold increase from a month earlier. On the other, a rebellious opposition and a defiant grassroots movement have been pressing for the end of quarantine rules.

The president has expressed concern at the growing acrimony over Argentina's lockdown. "No society fulfils its destiny among insults and division, with hate as the common denominator," he said earlier this month in an address marking Argentina's national independence holiday.

While Fernández spoke, thousands of Argentinians were taking to the streets in a nationwide protest that mixed discontent over the lockdown with anger against his administration.

Anti-lockdown sentiment is being stoked by Fernández's predecessor, Mauricio Macri, a pro-business politician who lost his bid for re-election last year. "We have seen a government that has tried during the pandemic to undermine freedom of expression, justice, independence of the branches of government and private property," Macri said in a video posted on Twitter.

"This has generated an active and strong reaction from society, which has mobilised to express itself against these actions."

Macri's followers are displeased with a proposed one-time wealth tax to finance the cost of the pandemic, plans to expropriate the huge – but failing – grain trader Vicentin, and the recent release, pending trial, of businessman Lázaro Báez and former economy minister Amado Boudou, both facing charges of corruption during the 2007 to 2015 presidency of now vice-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

The political divide is mirrored by the sharp disparity between the incidence of coronavirus in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area – still in hard

City limits

The metropolitan area consists of Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires – a bastion of anti-Perónist sentiment governed by Mauricio Macri's Republican Proposal party for the last 13 years, with 3 million inhabitants – and its surrounding urban sprawl, known as Greater Buenos Aires, the backbone of Perónist support, with 11.8 million inhabitants, which falls under the jurisdiction of the province of Buenos Aires.

▲ People in Buenos Aires protest against the president's health policies

JUAN MABROMATA/AFP/GETTY

lockdown with 95% of the country's active cases – and the rest of Argentina, where containment of the virus has permitted the relaxing of restrictions.

"Argentina has two realities," health strategies undersecretary Alejandro Costa said. "One is most of the country – where transmission has been brought under control – and the other is the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. They are two separate but indivisible districts."

The pandemic has forced the city's chief of government, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, from Macri's more conservative party, and Buenos Aires governor Axel Kicillof, a Perónist firebrand, to coordinate health policies. But their uneasy cooperation, mediated by even-keeled president Fernández, is being tested by Larreta's eagerness to ease the lockdown.

Buenos Aires is planning a gradual reopening, despite reporting the highest incidence of coronavirus in Argentina. More than 38,000 city dwellers have tested positive so far – an average of three people per city block.

Governor Kicillof is fearful the high level of contagion could spread to his province, where cases are numerically higher but proportionally much lower. "The province has only 0.3 contagions per hundred people, the city has one contagion per hundred," Kicillof said at a recent press conference.

Buenos Aires also leads Argentina's mortality rate with 230 Covid-19-related deaths per million inhabitants, compared with about only 60 per million in Greater Buenos Aires and just 41 per million for all of Argentina.

Fearful of the spread of the pandemic, the provinces are monitoring the transport of merchandise from Buenos Aires. "We have control posts on every highway, we test every truck driver," Raúl Jalil, the governor of the northern province of Catamarca, said.

Argentina's second most populous and economically powerful province, Córdoba, is home to almost 8% of the country's 45 million people, but has had only 0.9% of reported cases.

Experts underline the higher population density in Buenos Aires as responsible for its predicament, but there may be other factors at play. "The response to guidelines from the people of Catamarca has been exceptional," says Jalil. "We have a different attitude, perhaps because we are less arrogant than in the big cities."

UKI GOÑI REPORTS FROM ARGENTINA FOR THE GUARDIAN

PAKISTAN

After the acid attacks, a new start in a Lahore beauty salon

By Shah Meer Baloch LAHORE

Margaret Heera runs her fingers through her customer's hair. "You must manage time for yourself and your skin," she said, as she tied the hair into an elaborate knot.

The beauty salon in Lahore was busy. Women waited to get their hair done, for manicures and pedicures. The salon is a place of sanctuary for women in the city. But for Heera, 29, it's much more.

One day in 2013, Heera's husband of two years locked her in a room and poured acid over her face and body. He was unhappy about the small dowry she'd received from her parents.

Every year many women in Pakistan are attacked with acid, despite

legislation aimed at preventing such attacks.

Heera is one of seven women working in the Depilex salon as part of a jobs scheme for acid attack survivors who are often shunned, overlooked for jobs and treated as outcasts.

"At first, most of the clients were shocked when they saw me, my scars ... they wouldn't allow me to work for them, but now it's all good. Everyone is very supportive," said Heera. "Now, I am independent. I am investing in my son's education."

Launched in 1980 by business-woman Masarrat Misbah, the salon chain has spread across the country. In 2005, Misbah set up the Depilex Smileagain Foundation to support burn victims, particularly survivors of acid attacks, with reconstructive surgery, counselling, vocational training, and jobs in her salons.

Abdiya Shaheen, Smileagain's programme manager, said that out of 750 women registered with the foundation, 460 are survivors of acid attacks.

Most acid attackers are men, and the majority of victims are women. The attacks often happen because women are perceived to be shunning gender traditions, by refusing a marriage proposal, for example. Women have also been attacked with acid for giving birth to girls.

Legislation introduced in Pakistan in 2011 saw offenders face between 14 years and life imprisonment, as well as a fine of 1m rupees (\$4,800).

According to data collected by NGO

80

The number of acid attacks reported in Pakistan in 2019, down 50% from five years before

38%

The conviction rate of offenders in 2018 - a drop from 63% in 2016

▼ Acid burn survivor Saria working at the Depilex salon in Lahore

SIPA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), between 2007 and 2018 there were 1,485 reported cases of acid attacks in Pakistan. About a third involved children splashed with acid when family members were attacked.

One reason for the high number of cases is the difficulty in controlling the sale of acid, used for cotton growing, a key industry in Punjab. Cotton products account for 10% of the country's GDP.

Last year, 80 acid attacks were reported, a 50% drop since 2014. But while the fall in cases is seen by some as evidence that the legislation is effective, others believe many more incidents go unreported.

In 2012, authorities ruled that acid attacks would be prosecuted in courts that were originally established to try terror suspects. The state says using these special courts both speeds up the legal process and sends a strong message about the importance the government places on ending acid attacks.

The approach seems to be working. According to ASF, which also works with police and lawyers, only 2-3% of acid attacks were reported in Punjab before the law changed. Now, more than 90% of cases are reported.

Last year, Punjab's chief minister, Usman Buzdar, committed 100m rupees to helping survivors of acid and burn attacks undergo rehabilitation and come "back to life". The money is expected to provide support to 1,000 survivors.

Zainab Qaiserani, project coordinator at ASF, says the authorities still need to do more.

"We are currently advocating for a bill on a provincial and federal level to ensure free provision of medical and rehabilitation services to acid attack and burn victims, along with developing a monitoring and funding mechanism," she said.

Sabra Sultana, manager of the Depilex salon in Jhelum, was attacked with acid in 1993 by her husband in a dowry dispute. She took the case to court, but her husband accused her of being mentally unstable, and he walked free. Sultana, who began training as a beautician in 2006, says she now lives life on her own terms and supports other survivors.

"So many lives [have been] torn apart, but we are fighting this now," she said. "It's never too late."

SHAH MEER BALOCH IS A JOURNALIST FROM PAKISTAN





AFGHANISTAN

'Artlords' take brushes to battle for Kabul's blast walls

By Stefanie Glinski KABUL

From the killing of George Floyd in the US and the drowning of Afghan refugees in Iran, to the signing of the US-Taliban agreement towards peace and the murder of a Japanese aid worker, a group of Afghan artists have taken paintbrushes to adorn Kabul's grey blast walls with vivid imagery.

The barriers have been transformed into politically inspired murals, which the artists hope will create "visual dialogue" and raise awareness of corruption and injustices.

The war-torn Afghan capital is full of these large concrete barriers. The worsening security situation and countless attacks have seen more blast walls built all over Kabul.

Since 2014, Artlords – a word play on warlords and drug lords, of which Afghanistan has many – a collective of artists and volunteers, has put some of the country's politics into paintings, aiming to reflect the city's atmosphere.

"We want to turn public opinion into murals, that's why we paint what

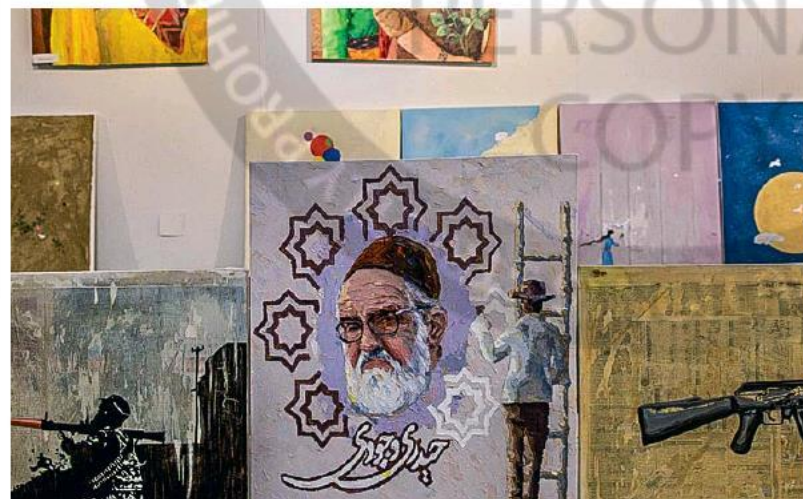
we hear on the streets," said Abrar Kakarr, Artlords' programme manager. "We don't want to offend, we want to criticise."

The group sketched a portrait of Floyd, the 46-year-old black man killed by police in Minneapolis, as well as a mural of Afghan refugees drowning in a river in Iran after fleeing their home country. It is alleged that Iranian border guards forced them into the water at gunpoint.

"We painted those in a day," Kakarr said. "We usually electronically project the image against the wall and then dive into the painting process with brushes, ladders and a bunch of volunteers."

Another mural, of the head of a Japanese aid agency, Tetsu Nakamura, who specialised in irrigation projects and was killed by gunmen in the eastern city of Jalalabad in December, went up in Kabul shortly after his murder.

Times in Afghanistan were especially difficult when Artlords was founded. President Ashraf Ghani first took up office in 2014 after quarrels with his rival Abdullah Abdullah. Then US president Barack Obama declared that it was "time to turn the page on a decade in which so much of our foreign policy was focused on the [war] in Afghanistan", saying that he planned to withdraw troops by the end of 2016.



Murals of drowning Afghans in Iran and George Floyd are among the images painted on to the city's many blast walls – barriers to protect buildings and people from explosions

STEFANIE GLINSKI



All this inspired Artlords co-founders Omaid Sharifi and Kabir Mokamel to paint their first mural: a pair of eyes with the words "I see you" – questioning the "corrupt government".

Since then the group has painted almost 2,000 murals.

"We want to be a voice for the people through our art. We want to make sure that those who are in power hear this voice and feel ashamed. They should know that people have not forgotten the crimes that they have done during the past years," said Sharifi.

Kakarr said: "Politically, we're facing an uncertain future in Afghanistan. Many people fear the Taliban gaining strength; many are directly affected by killings and attacks. We hope our murals can address the suffering and injustices faced and point towards peace."

STEFANIE GLINSKI IS A REPORTER BASED IN KABUL

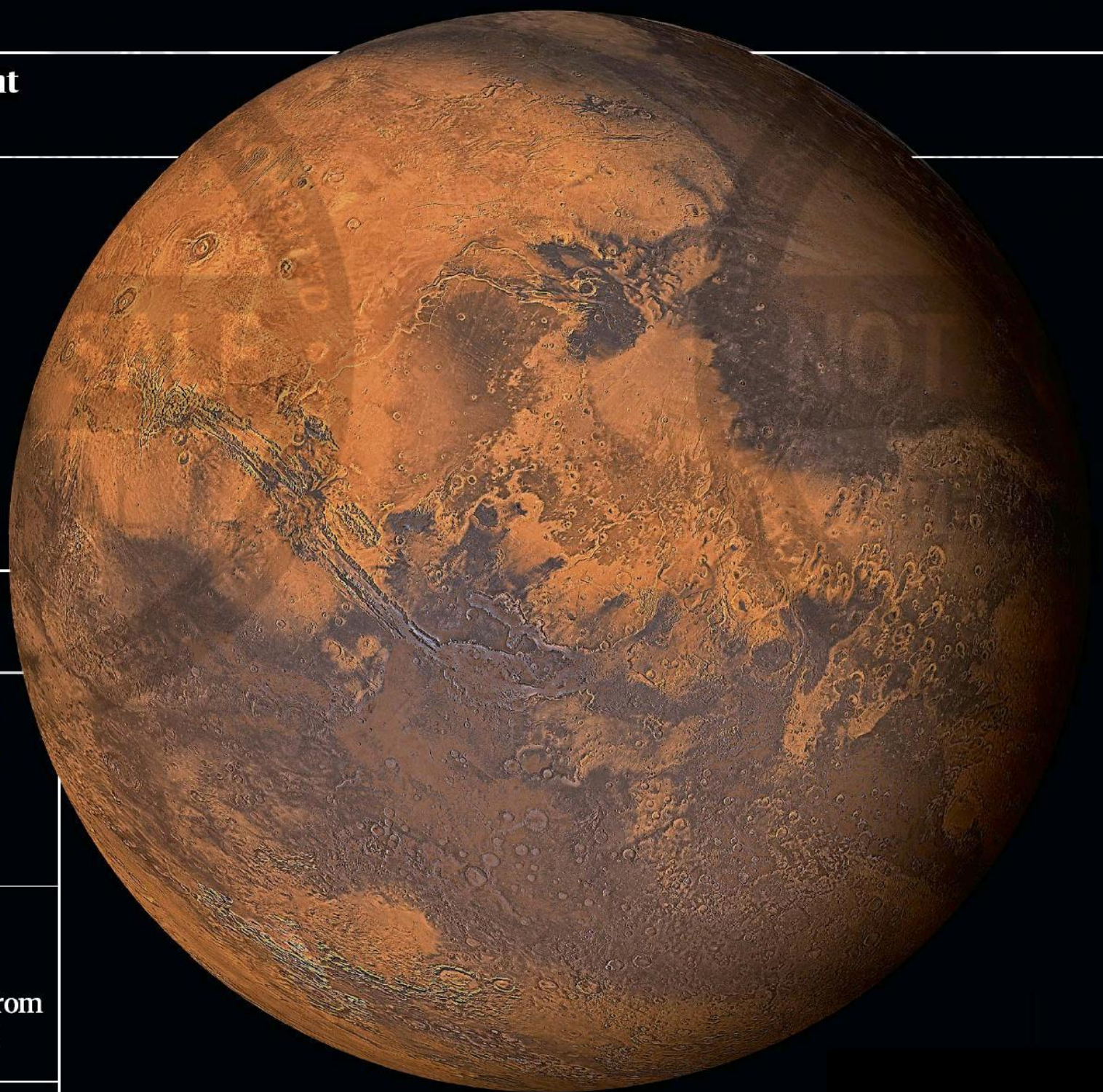
24 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

SPACE

Seeing
red

Tourist season on Mars
The red planet's launch window is about to open, meaning a raft of visitors from the US, China and the UAE

By Robin McKie



In the next few weeks, a flotilla of probes will be blasted into space from launch pads around the world and propelled towards one of the solar system's most mysterious objects: the planet Mars. Within days of each other, spacecraft built by the US, China and the United Arab Emirates will be sent on separate, seven-month voyages to investigate the red planet.

Never has so much interplanetary traffic been put en route to Mars at one time - and all of it is intended to help answer a question that has nagged scientists for decades: is there, or was there ever, life on Mars?

"Robot missions over the past decade or so have shown that Mars is not a dead, alien place as we had concluded in the late 20th century. In fact it is a world peppered with old lake beds, dried-out river channels and organic material," said Professor Ray Arvidson of Washington University in St Louis, Missouri.

"In other words, back in the day, billions of years ago, Mars was warm and wet. Now we are going to find out if those conditions led to the evolution of life on Mars, just as they did on Earth, and to see if some of that life still persists underground."

In every case, the spacecraft that make up the new Mars flotilla are highly ambitious in design and construction. The US mission - to be launched in early August - will involve dropping a van-sized robot rover called Perseverance into Jezero Crater, near an ancient river delta, in the Syrtis Major region of Mars. It will then examine rocks on the crater floor and collect samples, which it will leave in caches to be collected, in several years' time, by another robot rover.

The samples will then be placed in a rocket and blasted back to Earth in the hope of bringing around 500g of Martian soil and rock to researchers' laboratories by 2031. These samples could reveal signs of past or even

▲ The orbits of Earth and Mars align every 26 months, making launches easier

MANJIK/ALAMY

▼ The Mars rover Perseverance

NASA/AFP/GETTY

present Martian life.

In addition, Perseverance will carry a tiny robot helicopter, another first for Mars, and will also attempt to extract oxygen from the carbon dioxide in the Martian atmosphere - as a test of methods for supporting future human explorers of the planet.

Equally ambitious, the Chinese mission, Tianwen-1, is essentially a



three-in-one spacecraft consisting of a satellite that will orbit Mars, a lander, and also a rover that will travel across the Martian surface in search of water, ice and other features. China has developed considerable expertise in landing spacecraft and robot rovers on the moon. Now it is scaling up its operations and is crossing interplanetary space to try out its hardware on Mars.

And finally there is the Emirates Mars Mission, or Hope as it is also known. It was scheduled to launch this week on a Japanese H-2A rocket from the Tanegashima Space Centre and is the first interplanetary mission carried out by an Arab nation. The craft will enter Martian orbit in early 2021, marking the 50th anniversary of the birth of the United Arab Emirates, and will study, in detail, the atmosphere of the red planet. The craft is fitted with an infra-red spectrometer for studying Martian clouds and dust storms and ultraviolet detectors for analysing gases in the planet's upper atmosphere. This data will then be combined and used to produce the first global weather map of the planet.

This mushrooming of Martian missions is remarkable, but the fact that these probes have launch dates so near to each other is influenced by celestial mechanics, said Open University astrobiologist Susanne Schwenzer.

"Every 26 months, the orbits of Earth and Mars are aligned in a way that makes it relatively easy to send a rocket there," she said. "These launch windows last only a few weeks and one is just about to open up - which explains why these different probes are being prepared for launch over such a brief period this summer."

"There is no doubt that the exploration of Mars is going through a rebirth," said Arvidson. "In the 1970s, the Viking missions to Mars revealed a world that appeared to be utterly dead and we stopped sending missions to the planet for a couple of decades. However, more recent probes have changed that view."

These missions - which have included the US robot rovers Spirit, Opportunity and Curiosity - have shown that Mars must once have been lush and warm but was doomed as a cradle for complex life because of its size. The planet's diameter is half that of Earth's, which means it has a much smaller core at its heart compared with the one at the centre of our own planet. The Martian core, once

molten, cooled and solidified billions of years ago while our larger core has remained hot and molten, allowing convection currents within it to generate a magnetic field around the Earth.

And that is crucial. Without a molten core, Mars could no longer generate a magnetic field that had protected it from radiation from the Sun, just as Earth's magnetic field still shields us today. As a result, the Martian atmosphere and its surface water were swept away by this bombardment of solar particles and the planet became barren and hostile.

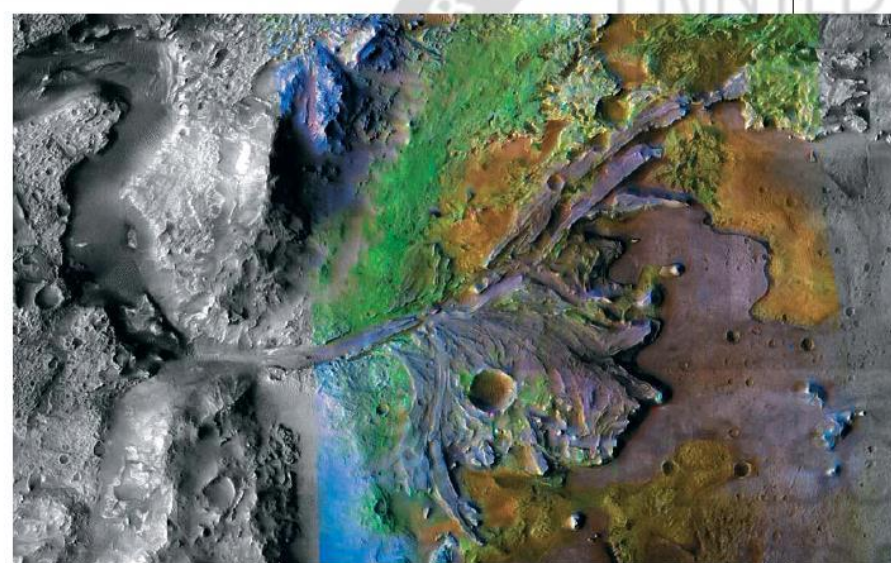
However, there is still a chance that life evolved there before the Martian climate changed, said Schwenzer. "Mars is relatively small and so it would have cooled down more quickly than Earth after the hot, primordial creation of the solar system 4.6bn years ago.

"Seas, lakes and rivers would have formed there before they did on Earth and so life may have arrived on Mars before it did on our world. It's grounds for hope, if nothing else. Now we want to find evidence that it did arise and possibly may still be thriving underground."

Nasa's robot rover Perseverance bristles with devices for scrutinising the soil of Mars for signs of microbe-like life. One of these, called Sherloc, will zap rocks with an ultraviolet laser to identify signs of organic material or minerals that formed in watery environments, for example.

However, it will be the rocks that Perseverance collects that offer the best chance to find life, extant or extinct, on Mars, say researchers. These will have to be carefully selected by mission controllers as Perseverance trundles around Jezero Crater in order to give researchers back on Earth the best chance of finding evidence of life in them. That selection will be crucial, for it will shape the direction of Mars science for decades to come.

According to the plan devised by US and European space scientists, Perseverance will collect soil samples, place them in small metal tubes, seal them and leave them at designated sites. Then a second robot, to be built by the European Space Agency and known as a fetch rover, will land on Mars, visit these sites, and load the samples into a football-sized canister, which it will place in a rocket that will blast it into orbit round Mars. Then a



Flight club Missions to Mars

1965
The US probe Mariner 4 made the first successful fly-by of Mars, returning the first close-up pictures of its surface. They revealed a seemingly dead world.

1976
The US landed two Viking probes.

1997
The US Pathfinder probe carried a robotic rover called Sojourner to the Ares Vallis region.

2012
Nasa's rover Curiosity landed to investigate the planet's climate and geology. The craft is still in operation.



second robot spaceship will capture the canister, head back to Earth, and release it so that it lands, by parachute, in the Utah desert.

There is a great deal that could go wrong, researchers acknowledge, but if we are to discover if there once was life on Mars, and possibly still exists there, this is the kind of ambitious, expensive task that will have to be undertaken, they say.

The crucial point is that finding life on Mars goes beyond revealing the secrets of our own planetary backyard. "It is still not understood how the first replicating metabolising structures that we'd call 'alive' arose," said Martin Rees, the astronomer royal. "This process could be a rare fluke, one that only happened once in our galaxy - here on Earth. On the other hand, it could be common and it turns out that life is widespread across the cosmos."

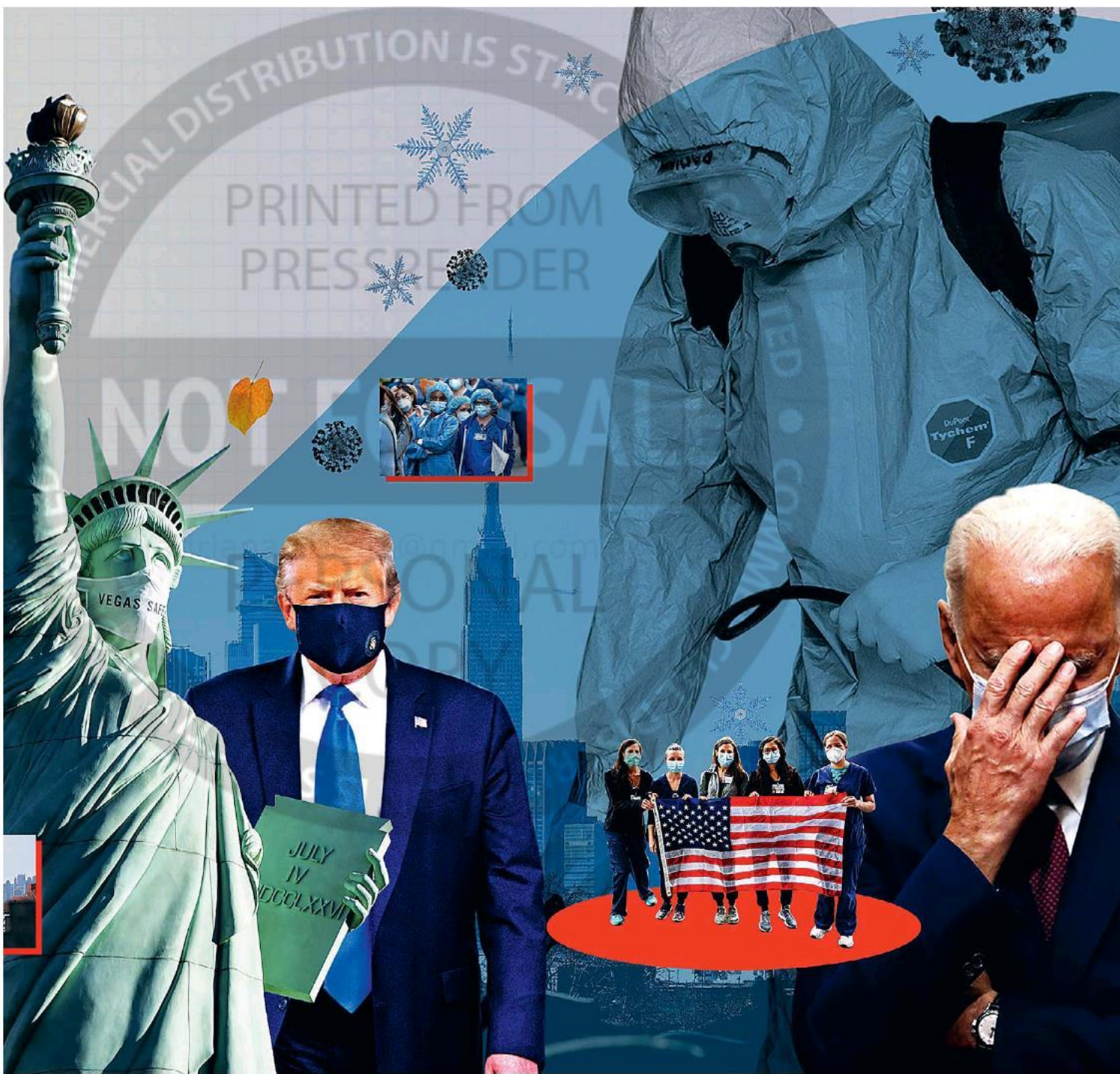
And that is why Mars is of such fascination to scientists - for if they detect living beings in a second location in our own solar system, that would suggest life is not a fluke and is likely to have emerged on billions of planets in our galaxy.

However, there's one key caveat, added Rees. "We would have to be sure that the origins of life on Mars and life on Earth were completely independent of each other and that poses a problem - for it is possible that meteorites and asteroids crashing on Mars billions of years ago during the birth of the solar system could have sent rocks carrying primitive Martian life into space and some could have reached Earth. These could have seeded our planet. By that token, all lifeforms on Earth, including humans, would have actually originated on Mars. We are all Martians, in short!" *Observer*

ROBIN MCKIE IS THE OBSERVER'S
SCIENCE EDITOR

The dark autumn

What lies ahead for America?



want to strive for herd immunity. The point is to slow the spread as much as possible until we have other tools.”

But the ability of the US to take that basic step is in perilous doubt. After half a year, the Trump administration has made no effort to establish a national protocol for testing, contact tracing and supported isolation – the proven strategy by which other countries control their outbreaks.

Critics say that instead, Trump has dithered and denied as the national death toll climbed to over 140,000. Last Sunday, it was revealed that Trump is even seeking to block billions of dollars in testing and tracing efforts; money proposed by Republicans as part of a relief package.

Meanwhile the White House has attacked Dr Anthony Fauci, the country’s foremost expert on infectious diseases whose refusal to lie to the public has enraged Trump, by publishing an op-ed signed by one of the president’s top aides titled Anthony Fauci has been wrong about everything I have interacted with him on, and by releasing a file of opposition research to the Washington Post.

Trump claimed the number of cases



‘The fall and winter will be one of the most difficult times’

Dr Robert Redfield

was a function of unusually robust testing, though experts said that positivity rates of 20% in multiple states suggested that the United States is testing too little – and that in any case closing one’s eyes to the problem by testing less would not make it go away.

“We’ve done 45 million tests,” Trump said last week, padding the figure only slightly. “If we did half that number, you’d have half the cases, probably around that number. Everyone would be saying we’re doing well on cases.” Such statements by Trump have encouraged unfavourable comparisons of the US pandemic response with those in countries such as Italy, which recorded just 169 new cases last Monday after a horrific spring, and South Korea, which has kept cases in the low double-digits since April.

But the United States could also look to many African countries for lessons in pandemic response, said Amanda McClelland, who runs a global epidemic prevention program at Resolve to Save Lives.

“We’ve seen some good success in countries like Ghana, who have really focused on contact tracing, and being able to follow up superspreading events,” said McClelland. “We see Ethiopia: they kept their borders open

for a lot longer than other countries, but they have really aggressive testing and active case-finding to make sure that they’re not missing cases.”

But in America, the large laboratories that process Covid-19 tests are unable to keep up with demand. Quest Diagnostics announced last week that its average turnaround time for test results was a minimum of seven days for most patients.

“You can’t have unlimited lab capacity, and what we’ve done is allow, to some extent, cases to go beyond our capacity,” said McClelland. “We’re never going to be able to treat and track and trace uncontrolled transmission. This outbreak is just too infectious.”

Public health experts emphasise that the United States does not have to accept as its fate a cascade of tens of millions of new cases, and tens of thousands of deaths. Focused leadership and individual resolve could yet help the country.

But it is clear that the most vulnerable Americans face grave danger. Republicans have argued in recent weeks that while cases in the US have soared, death rates are not climbing so quickly, because new cases are disproportionately affecting younger adults. That is a false reassurance, health experts say, because deaths are a lagging indicator and because large outbreaks among any demographic speeds the virus’s ability to get inside nursing homes, care facilities and other places where residents are most vulnerable.

There is a question of whether the United States, for all its wealth and expertise – and its self-regard as an exceptional actor on the world stage – can summon the will to keep up the fight. “I think unfortunately people are emotionally exhausted from having to think about and worry about this virus,” said Nuzzo.

It is as if the country is “treading water in the middle of the ocean”, Hanage said. “People tend to be shuffling very quickly between denial and fatalism,” he said. “What I would hope is that this marks a point when the United States finally wakes up and realises that this is a pandemic and starts taking it seriously. People keep making these excuses, and the virus doesn’t care about the excuses. The virus just keeps going. If you give it the opportunity, it will take it.” *Observer*

TOM MCCARTHY IS NATIONAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT FOR GUARDIAN US

UNITED STATES

The late John Lewis, a titan of modern America

David Smith WASHINGTON

He was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington in 1963. More than half a century later, he stood outside the White House surveying the words "Black Lives Matter" painted on a street. John Lewis's story was in many ways America's story and testament to its unfinished journey.

Lewis, a titan of the civil rights movement, died last Friday at the age of 80, severing a vital link with the generation that rose in the 60s to resist the US's version of racial apartheid. The news was met with a depth of grief normally reserved for former presidents. Lewis transcended party politics

and was truly admired and beloved.

He grew up on a farm in rural Alabama, a short walk from the cotton fields of the Jim Crow south. Lewis, who had ambitions to be a minister, tried out his oratory by preaching to the family chickens. He went to segregated public schools and was denied a library card because of the colour of his skin, but he was an avid reader of books and newspapers and was inspired by the sound of Martin Luther King's sermons on the radio.

Lewis wrote to King seeking support to become the first black student at his local college, and became a fellow advocate of nonviolent protest, civil disobedience and, as he put it to the end, "good trouble". But this was never to be mistaken for a lack of radicalism or willingness to put himself on the line: he was arrested 40 times from 1960 to 1966.

Lewis organised sit-ins at whites-only lunch counters and volunteered as a Freedom Rider, enduring beatings and arrests while challenging segregated interstate travel. He helped form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and became its chairman.

This made him, aged 23, an organiser of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. "We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now," he told the huge crowd from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, shortly before King delivered his "I have a dream" speech.

'John Lewis was an American who knew that change could not wait for some other person or some other time; whose life is a lesson in the fierce urgency of now.'

Barack Obama

▼ John Lewis speaks at the March on Washington in April 1963

AFRO AMERICAN
NEWSPAPERS/GADO/
GETTY

Two years later, truncheon-wielding state troopers beat Lewis and fractured his skull as he led 600 protesters over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. TV images of the state-sponsored carnage stunned the nation, paving the way for the landmark Voting Rights Act.

Lewis wrote in his memoirs: "The American public had already seen so much of this sort of thing, countless images of beatings and dogs and cursing and hoses. But something about that day in Selma touched a nerve deeper than anything that had come before." A campaign is under way to rename the bridge after Lewis, who returned there often.

He took the battle for equality to the halls of Washington, winning a seat in the House of Representatives in 1986 and becoming known as the conscience of the US Congress, where he represented a Georgia district for 33 years.

Visitors to his office, brimming with photographs and memorabilia, were treated to anecdotes, humility and wisdom in his soft, slow southern lilt. He fought many losing policy battles but, even as an old lion in his 70s, he was leading a sit-in protest in the House chamber demanding tougher gun controls.

He lived to see the election of the US's first black president, Barack Obama, then a racial backlash in the form of Donald Trump, and then an eruption of mass protests against racial injustice that both echoed and dwarfed the marches of the 1960s.

Lewis refused to attend Trump's inauguration or State of the Union addresses. In one of his final media appearances after being diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer, he walked a street near the White House painted with a Black Lives Matter mural.

He saw the movement as another chapter in the cause that was his life's work, inspiring countless younger men and women. "Generations from now," said Obama, presenting the 2010 medal of freedom to Lewis, "when parents teach their children what is meant by courage, the story of John Lewis will come to mind - an American who knew that change could not wait for some other person or some other time; whose life is a lesson in the fierce urgency of now." *Observer*

DAVID SMITH IS THE GUARDIAN'S WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF





PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW



The Nespresso cup was one of the greatest marketing campaigns of all time - and changed how many people drank coffee. But, with millions of discarded pods in landfill somewhere, is its time up?

BY ED CUMMING

In 1975

a young engineer named Eric Favre took a trip to Rome that would change the history of coffee. Favre had recently started working at Nestlé's headquarters in Vevey, Switzerland, and one of his first projects was to develop a machine that would combine the convenience of domestic coffee with the quality of an Italian espresso bar, where customers paid more for a product made by an expert using large, expensive equipment.

Successful products can look inevitable in hindsight, but the gap in the market wasn't obvious. At the time, two kinds of coffee were drunk at home. There was roast and ground, which was tasty but laborious, whether prepared in a cafetière, stove-top or filter machine. Or there was soluble instant coffee, which was quick and easy but had an unsubtle flavour. To be tempting at a higher price, Favre's new machine had to offer high-quality coffee with the speed and ease of instant.

Wandering through the centre of Rome, Favre noticed a long queue snaking from a coffee bar near the Pantheon. Plenty of other cafes nearby used the same machines. What was it about this place, Favre wondered, that made it so special? Inside, the barista explained that other operators pumped the piston just once before releasing the coffee. But at Sant'Eustachio Il Caffè, the baristas pumped repeatedly. This meant they forced more water and air into the ground beans,

which meant greater oxidation, which drew out more flavour from the beans and produced more of a *crema* - the layer of foam formed on top of a good espresso.

In the history of at-home premium coffee, this is perhaps the closest anyone has ever come to a eureka moment. Favre returned to Switzerland and, along with a small team, set about designing a machine that could replicate this procedure. The idea of a portioned coffee system had been around since the 50s, but no one had seriously pursued it. Favre's aim was to build a world in which espresso was available at home. Customers would own a machine into which they would place a sealed pod filled with ground coffee. The pod would keep the coffee fresh. The capsule design would also ensure greater aeration, mimicking the repeat oxidisations at the Sant'Eustachio. After the pod was inserted, a needle-like spout would pierce one end. Hot water would be pumped through this needle at high pressure. As the capsule became pressurised with water, the foil would be forced against a spiked plate, bursting it inwards, and out through the spout would run an espresso.

The following year, 1976, Nestlé filed its first patent for a single-serve coffee system. "Favre is one of those people who pop up in history and do great things," Marco Restelli, Nespresso's head of product and development, told me at Nespresso's offices in Lausanne. "OK, it's not Einstein, but what he achieved within kitchen appliances will stay with us for a long time."

Today, some 14bn Nespresso capsules are sold every year,



35



PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604

Taking the sip

both online and from 810 brightly lit boutiques in 84 countries. More than 400 Nespressos are drunk every second. Hundreds of rivals and imitators have emerged, some making capsules for Nespresso machines, others pushing competitor systems. The firm employs more than 13,000 people and the Nespresso magazine, which the company has referred to as a “biannual pleasure guide”, has a circulation of more than 2m. In 2013, the most recent year it released figures, Nespresso’s revenues totalled \$10.8bn. Its success has provided its public face, the actor George Clooney, with the means to maintain a private satellite over Sudan.

For a certain kind of business traveller, the sight of a little Nespresso pod in a drawer by the minibar has become as familiar as a Gideon Bible. Buying a machine grants you membership of the Nespresso Club, literally, and also membership of the Nespresso club, metaphorically – a global fellowship of people who care enough about their morning brew to spend 50 cents on 5 grams of it, but not enough to spend more than 30 seconds preparing it. In their homes, the distinctive hum, whirr and clunk of a machine in action has taken its place alongside the churn of a dishwasher. “If Nespresso had been a startup from Silicon Valley, everyone would be hailing them,” says Rory Sutherland, the vice-chair of the advertising agency Ogilvy, who owns three Nespresso machines. “They’re like a Swiss Apple.”

Thirty years after its first successes, Nespresso has scale, experience and buying power that no other premium coffee company can match. But increasingly it finds itself threatened from below by its rivals’ cheaper capsules and from above by fussier coffee enthusiasts. The more scrutiny Nespresso has attracted, the tighter it has drawn the curtains. It no longer releases figures about its sales or revenues, with its results buried in the overall Nestlé reports. James Hoffmann, the author of the World Atlas of Coffee, describes Nespresso as “a black box of a company”.

Nespresso also faces mounting criticism over the environmental impact of its pods. (It does not release any figures for how many of its aluminium capsules end up dumped in landfill, rather than recycled.) Talk to people in the industry and you get the sense that Nespresso’s golden age has passed. “In the major markets, Nespresso’s getting close to saturation point and there’s lots of competition,” says Jean-Paul Gaillard, Nespresso’s former CEO. “The good years are over.”

Nespresso triumphed by selling itself as a sophisticated component of an elite, globalised lifestyle. Wherever you were in the world, you could be a Nespresso person, just as you could wear Nike trainers or use American Express. Now, as that lifestyle looks increasingly bankrupt, it is learning to be just another coffee company. Nespresso helped change the coffee world, but it seems as if the world has moved on. Nespresso argues that its coffee has never been better, but the truth is that Nespresso has never really been about the coffee.

‘Clooney was a major mistake. It’s two stars on the screen: the product and the person’

The pod father Eric Favre with his Nespresso patent

FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP/GETTY



AT NESTLÉ HEADQUARTERS IN VEVEY, there is a small museum dedicated to the history of Nespresso. Looking at the early prototypes on display – elaborate Rube Goldberg-type machines with outsize tanks and pumps and tubes – it is easy to see why it took 10 years after the first patent was filed for the product to come to market.

As a private company, Nestlé was able to fund its pet project without justifying the cost to the stock market. Within the company, though, there were doubters. Colleagues feared that if Favre’s invention succeeded it would cannibalise the company’s existing coffee businesses, especially the flagship Nescafé instant brand. At the time, Nestlé saw itself as a mass-market company that sold cheap, reliable products: chocolate and baby food and cereal. This was something different, whatever it was.

When Nespresso was finally launched in 1986, it seemed like the sceptics had been right all along. The first models were designed to resemble traditional espresso machines, bigger and clunkier than the sleek designs available today, and only four types of capsule were available, offering various strengths of coffee. Pitched to businesses in Switzerland and Japan, for offices without enough space for a full-size coffee machine, Nespresso failed to find many takers. In 1988, in a bid to rescue the product, Nestlé brought in Gaillard, a tobacco man who had created the clothing brand Marlboro Classics when he worked at Philip Morris. Gaillard would work alongside Favre, but his brief was clear: if he couldn’t turn the ship around, it would be sunk. “At the original launch, the product was wrong, the positioning was wrong and the targeting was wrong,” Gaillard told me. “It had cost a lot of money and brought nothing.”

Under Gaillard, Nespresso would be transformed from an office coffee company into a luxury brand, the look and feel of which would be as much a part of the product as the beans themselves. “I wanted to create the Chanel of coffee and decided to keep it chic and bobo,” he said in a 2010 interview. The idea was to keep it to “the level of people who have a doorman”. He told me he took inspiration from the wine industry. “The coffee was good and easy to make, but how do you spread the luxury feel?”

Where Favre and his team had focused on technical questions, Gaillard worried about everything else. He cut the price of the machines and licensed them to third parties. The first home machines had been made with one firm, Turmix. Later, you could buy a Krupps or Alessi Nespresso machine. These brand associations gave Nespresso familiarity in local markets and encouraged fancy shops such as Harrods to stock them. Gaillard also overhauled the capsules, reducing the aluminium content and putting up the price by 50%. Most importantly, he began marketing Nespresso to individual consumers, rather than to businesses, through the new Club Nespresso. It was no longer just a better coffee for your office – it was a way of life.

When you ordered capsules, you joined the “Club”, which also

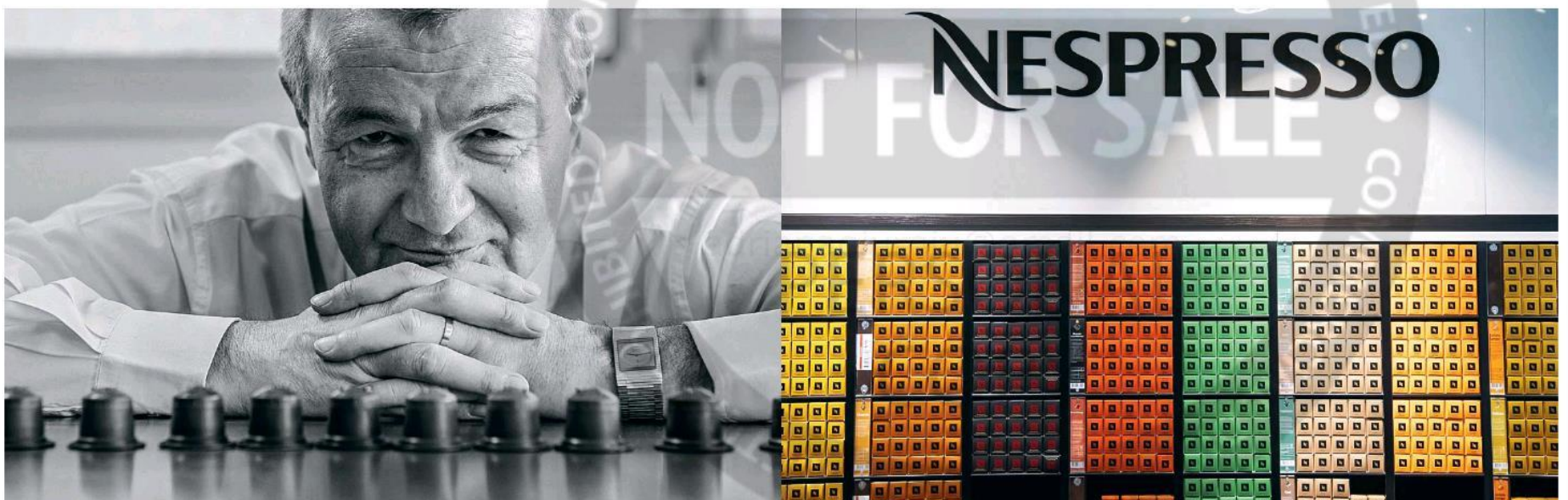
marketed with Italian-style language. According to the historian of consumption Jonathan Morris, Nespresso capitalised on these new tastes: “When customers started to ask how they could have [Starbucks-style coffee] at home, Nespresso was the best-placed product to take advantage of that.” Between its Fortissio and Vivalto pods, it had the cod-Italian ready to go, too. The first Nespresso e-commerce site opened in 1998 and the first boutique opened in 2000. The following year, China’s admission to the World Trade Organization enabled the manufacture of much cheaper machines. Even before Clooney came along, the pot was bubbling nicely.

IN CLOONEY'S FIRST AD FOR NESPRESSO, which aired in 2006, he wanders into a Nespresso boutique and starts making himself a cup of coffee. Wearing a black polo neck and blazer, he eavesdrops as a couple of winsome women exchange adjectives: "Dark, very intense, balanced, delicate and smooth. Rich, very rich." Clooney: "You're talking about the Nespresso, right?" They look at him. "What else?" he says. French newspapers still sometimes refer to him as "Mr What Else?"

Clooney's public image - sophisticated, cosmopolitan, expensive - fitted Nespresso's desired image. "Mr Clooney embodies elegance," Anna Lundstrom, the company's chief brand officer, told me. "He cares about certain causes, so you know he's not going to endorse something he doesn't care about or believe in. But there's a humour to him, too."

Clooney has reportedly made more than \$40m from his Nespresso work. He has said he spends most of it on the satellite he uses to monitor human rights abuses. "I think it would be hard to endorse any product for an extended period of time if you're not proud of your association," he told me via email. "It's been easy because I love the product. I drink it every day." Is it true that there are countries where he is better known for the ads than his acting? "Probably. I know there are countries where I'm more famous for being Amal Clooney's husband," he said Clooneyishly.

The years that followed Clooney's first ad were Nespresso's happiest. In 2006, its revenues passed £500m. By 2010 they had reached 3bn Swiss francs (\$3.15bn) and the capsule market was growing five times faster than the overall coffee market. In Switzerland, Nespresso took business from roast and



Taking the sip

ground; in China, from tea; in Britain, from instant. Nespresso reigned supreme over an entire domain of coffee that it had effectively created from scratch.

One major market has largely held out against Nespresso's global conquest: the US. Partly the company was too slow, beaten by Keurig's K-Cup. Where Nespresso aimed high, with sleek aluminium pods that emphasised quality, K-Cup's plastic pods, many of which until recently were non-recyclable, emphasise convenience. The Nespresso system also sat uneasily in a coffee culture that prefers to drink coffee in enormous cups, ideally while driving. "Americans are simply not looking for an espresso first thing in the morning," said Jim Watson, a senior beverages analyst at Rabobank in New York. "One of the biggest issues Keurig and Nespresso face is not making enough ounces. This is the land of the Starbucks venti. People are used to getting a 16oz or even a 20oz coffee."

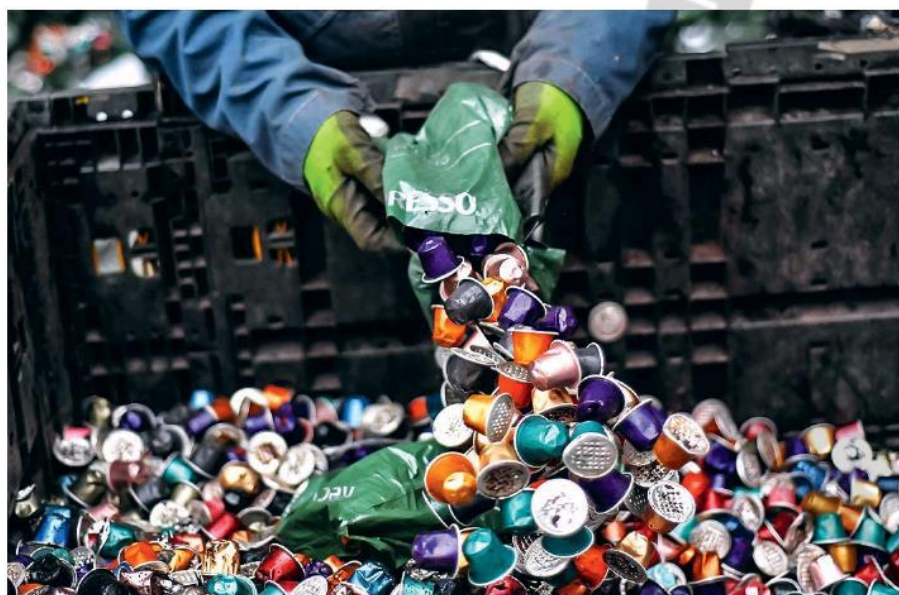
In a bid to crack the US, Nespresso introduced a whole new range of machines – the Vertuo system, capable of delivering much larger portions. In 2015, it finally signed up Clooney to a North American deal; until then he had only been the face of the firm in the rest of the world. Jean-Marc Duvoisin, who was CEO until the end of last year, told me that brand awareness went up by a multiple of "five or six" when Clooney arrived. But still, to this day, in the US Nespresso exists in the long, dark shadow of the K-Cup.

ALTHOUGH NESPRESSO'S RISE CAN BE TOLD in part as a triumph of branding, it also depended on a smart approach to patenting and design. One of Gaillard's innovations was to rebalance the business towards making revenue from the capsules rather than the machines. Just as Gillette have traditionally made most of their money by selling the replacement razor blades rather than the first handle, so Nespresso's entry-level machines were sold at lower prices, in the knowledge that customers would have to keep buying the pods, because only Nespresso pods worked in Nespresso machines.

For years, that model underpinned Nespresso's global growth. But eventually, would-be competitors spotted an opportunity to exploit the niche that Nespresso had created. Nestlé had ploughed a decade of investment into a system that got people to pay five times more for coffee at home than for traditional roast and ground: why not try to piggyback on that? In 2008, Gaillard launched the Ethical Coffee Company, which sold biodegradable capsules for Nespresso machines. In 2010, the American firm Sara Lee started to sell capsules that worked in Nespresso machines.

Nespresso furiously litigated against its rivals, arguing that its patent systems were being infringed. Things came to a head in 2012,

▼ Reuse it
Nespresso
recycles its
aluminium pods
in Cheshire, UK
ANTHONY DEVLIN/PA



when a key batch of Nespresso patents from 1992 were set to expire. That year, Nespresso lost its patent battles in Germany and England and settled other outstanding cases around Europe. Overnight, the company had to accept it could no longer stop third-party capsules being sold for its machines. Talk to senior executives involved at the time and it is clear that the rulings were traumatic for the company.

The court cases also made awkward PR for a company keen to promote its ethical sourcing. To many, it seemed that the Nestlé Goliath had gone after smaller, pluckier, seemingly more ethical Davids and been slain. It didn't help that, in many consumers' eyes, Nestlé was still tainted by the formula milk scandal of the 70s. A report published in 1974, titled *The Baby Killer*, showed how Nestlé aggressively promoted formula milk over breastfeeding in poor countries, where clean water was hard to come by. Some sales reps even wore nurses' uniforms to gain an aura of credibility. The report led to a worldwide boycott and reform of its sales practices.

Duvoisin became CEO in 2013 and was charged with taking Nespresso to a new era, leaving the patent disputes behind. From a closed, Apple-type system – Nespresso products for Nespresso machines – the company had to move to a more open, Android-type model. "There are going to be rival capsules," Duvoisin told me. "We need to leverage our strengths: knowing our customers and knowing our farmers." Having worked for 40 years to be the only coffee-pod system in town, the company had to pivot to arguing that its capsules – made from strong, light aluminium and filled with high-quality, responsibly farmed coffee – were the best on the market. Eight years on from Nespresso's *annus horribilis*, its biggest problem is the aluminium itself.

Every generation has its own anxieties around coffee. In the 16th century, the governor of Mecca feared it would encourage his citizens to overthrow him. At the dawn of the 17th century, Pope Clement VIII declared it to be "the devil's drink". Some decades later, in London, women petitioned against coffee houses, claiming it made their husbands impotent. These days we are less worried about what coffee does to us, especially with widely available decaffeinated options, and more worried about what coffee does to the world.

In the past decade, consumers have grown increasingly concerned about the sheer amount of waste caused by coffee pods. Halo, a firm which makes compostable pods, estimates that of the 39,000 pods made every minute, 29,000 will end up in landfill. In 2016, the city of Hamburg introduced a ban on buying coffee pods with council money, as part of a crackdown on "polluting products".

Nespresso uses aluminium because it is light, strong and durable, making it the best material for a sealed container that must be flown around the world and then subjected to extreme heat and pressure on someone's kitchen counter. Only a tiny amount of coffee is used

39k

The number of compostable coffee pods made every minute, according to compostable pod manufacturer Halo

29k

The number of those pods that are destined to end up in landfill, according to Halo

One major market has held out against Nespresso's conquest – the US

in each pod, so less coffee is wasted than in a cafetière, or with other methods, in which many grams can be used per cup. And the pods are, in theory, 100% recyclable. But because they contain plastic as well as aluminium, they can't just be dropped in a regular recycling bin. Instead, used capsules must be dropped off at Nespresso boutiques or some convenience stores; in some countries, Nespresso offers a service that collects them from customers' homes.

Unlike plastic, used by many of Nespresso's rivals, aluminium is 100% recyclable, but there is a big difference between offering recycling facilities and getting consumers to use them. Nespresso says its global recycling rate is 30% and that 91% of its users have access to one of its 100,000 collection points around the world. But some experts have suggested that just 5% of Nespresso pods are recycled. Even if Nespresso's figure is accurate, with a conservative estimate of 14bn capsules being sold each year, and 0.9 grams of aluminium per capsule, that means 12,600 tonnes of Nespresso aluminium end up in landfill annually, enough for 60 Statues of Liberty.

"The business model of the future is not in grand statements about what companies will do," says Tima Bansal, a professor at Ivey Business school in Canada who specialises in sustainability. "It's about waste measurement and transparency. If someone measured the garbage I put out on the lawn, I'd behave differently." Bansal was mystified as to why Nespresso doesn't provide more detailed public data, such as regional breakdowns, about how its capsules are recycled. "With their competitive advantage, they could be a model of sustainability, leading the circular economy," she said. "But once you lose your way, the competition makes it really scary."

On top of the landfill problem, there are the environmental costs of producing aluminium in the first place. Mining a tonne of aluminium can produce about 10 to 12 tonnes of waste, including 2 to 3 tonnes of toxic alkaline red mud. In an attempt to go slightly more green, Nespresso is working with the commodities giant Rio Tinto to use only "sustainable aluminium". If a tie-in between an Anglo-Australian mining conglomerate with a history of scandals and a secretive Nestlé-owned coffee company doesn't calm the doubters, what will?

Sustainability in coffee is complex. Lots of the carbon cost is in transport, so by some measures the most efficient use of beans is instant coffee, where only a small amount of coffee is used per cup. But as that coffee tends to come from large farms growing cheaper beans, it can be a worse deal for farmers and encourage types of farming that have a bigger impact on the environment. One solution could be reusable pods, where fresh coffee can be loaded into a Nespresso-friendly capsule, but at a significant cost to convenience. Defenders of pods say that as well as using a smaller volume of coffee, they use less energy, as the machine only heats the small amount of water needed for each serving. But until Nespresso pods can be included in household recycling, the figures on reuse are unlikely

to improve. More eco-friendly competitors will continue to eat into Nespresso's market share.

AS NESPRESSO HAS GROWN, it has come up against an awkward truth: the more popular a brand is, the harder it is to maintain a luxury image. "Our competitor is not other coffee companies," claimed Duvoisin. "When you go into our boutique, you are comparing us to Dior or Louis Vuitton." That may have been true once, but its boutiques are now on every high street.

Nearly half a century after it was conceived, Nespresso finds itself in an uncomfortable new world. Consumers who might have once craved its polished, urbane chic now look for dirty-fingered artisanal blends to use with their pour-overs and Aeropress machines. A Nespresso machine on the kitchen counter used to prove your membership of a convenience-loving global consumer coffee elite. Increasingly it suggests that you are not a serious coffee person and that your attitude to the future of the planet is suspiciously relaxed.

In its heyday, Nespresso fit a story consumers were keen to tell themselves: that, for a small premium, quality could be guaranteed, whether you were in Tokyo, Geneva or Los Angeles. Its range of capsules offered the sense of choice, but in reality it was just one option: Nespresso. These days, there are more than 400 competitor capsules. Cheap plastic ones, refillable eco ones, limited-edition batches from faraway places. Speciality coffee has infiltrated the general population to the extent that, in the UK, McDonald's ran a gently sarcastic TV campaign about the flat white. Nespresso once wooed coffee lovers with its ease of use, and instant coffee drinkers with better coffee. Now there are alternatives for every taste.

"In many ways, the Nespresso pod is the microwave meal of coffee," said James Hoffman. "Nespresso is expensive for what it is. It's fine in terms of its quality, but with a little bit of effort you could make something far better at home." But as Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood, who runs an independent coffee shop in Bath, told me, Nespresso was never meant to rival true speciality coffee. "They don't want it to taste like that. They want it to have mass appeal."

"I love small-batch, third-wave coffee, too," said Karsten Ranitzsch, Nespresso's head of coffee, admiring his silos. "The guys with tattoos and beards stirring their beans in Brooklyn. It is artisanal. But here we want consistency." After the tour of Nespresso's facilities, Ranitzsch and I sat in the "coffee campus". Sitting at a tasting table, we sniffed, slurped and spat out a variety of different brews. He suggested aromas of flowers, fruit, earth and caramel and grew slightly wistful. "Coffee comes with history and memories," he said. "Growing up, you didn't like it, but you wanted to be like the adults. It has something to do with belonging."

Favre, too, sometimes turns poetic when he talks about coffee. He told me that his invention didn't make him rich, but that didn't bother him. "I don't mind about the money," he said. "I see Nespresso like a daughter who is always telling me: look at what you can do and look at what you did. I am very proud of her. She is mine, she is in my heart, she is always in my mind."

In summer 2020, buffeted by Covid-19, Nespresso trundles on. In a recent email, a spokesperson reported "mid single-digit growth", and the company has announced it will be expanding its Romont facility, but the mood is different. A new CEO, Guillaume Le Cunff, another long-term employee, who had previously worked on many of the company's sustainability initiatives, took over earlier this year. In late May, a new ad appeared on Nespresso's YouTube page. Over shots of farmers and waterfalls and thoughtful-looking agronomists, a female voice talks about ecosystems, farmers and recyclable aluminium. "Now, more than ever, doing the right thing matters," she says. "Those who know most about exceptional coffee know exceptional coffee comes from care." Clooney is nowhere to be seen ●

ED CUMMING IS A FEATURE WRITER BASED IN LONDON

24 July 2020 The Guardian

The battleship



In charge Editor-in-chief Julian Reichelt confers with his colleagues

NIELS STARNICK

The Guardian Weekly 24 July 2020

pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW

One of the largest newsprint publications in the world, the tabloid Bild Zeitung tries to rule all aspects of German life. Its political importance is enormous. And its editor, Julian Reichelt, has set his sights on the nation's popular chancellor, Angela Merkel
By Thomas Meaney

'It

WOULD BE IDEAL IF YOU COULD HIT A DEER," Julian Reichelt, editor-in-chief of Europe's largest tabloid, Bild Zeitung, told his chauffeur. "Guardian readers could do with a bit more colour." We had reached escape velocity out of ice-encrusted Düsseldorf. The Mercedes S-Class locked into place like a bobsled on the Autobahn. I sat shotgun with Reichelt's assortment of sports gear, a hockey stick between my legs. "We are lucky in our driver today," Reichelt said, deadpan. "Last time we hit a wild boar and the boar and the car went flying."

I was travelling with Reichelt on one of his publicity tours across Germany. For the past two years, he has made an appointment once a month to commune with groups of Bild's 1.3 million readers. "You have to feel their emotions," he told me from the backseat. "You have to listen to their hearts."

Reichelt, who is 40, made his name as a war reporter in Syria, but today confines most of his battle courage to Twitter, where he enjoys needling the German political establishment and barging into leftwing echo chambers. In person, Reichelt exudes a twitchy exuberance, like a fighter pilot who has managed to smuggle champagne into the cockpit. His eyes restlessly gauge the world around him, clocking who he needs to avoid and who he needs to attract. Into his phone, he volleys directives to subeditors, assistants and the band of young male disciples he sends around the world to collect stories. "The leading populist in western Germany," is how Albrecht von Lucke, editor of the prestigious left-liberal monthly Blätter, describes him.

Available at train stations, supermarkets, bakeries, kiosks, factories, Portuguese beach resorts, online, and everywhere else Germans buy things, Bild Zeitung squats like a large toad on German life. Bild, which

was partly modelled on the UK's Daily Mirror, is the largest newsprint publication in the world that uses Roman characters. Unlike its closest analogue in Britain, the Daily Mail, it has no real national competitors. Twenty regional editions seep into every pore of the country. Each month, its website attracts about 25 million readers. Bild is the prize battleship of Axel Springer, the German company founded in 1945 by the rightwing publisher of the same name. Today, Axel Springer is the largest media publishing firm in Europe, and is valued at about €7bn (\$8bn). Last year, the US private equity firm KKR acquired a 44% stake in the company.

For decades, Bild was an object of scorn for any self-respecting West German of social democratic orientation. In a political culture more conformist and decorous than most of its western peers, Bild functioned like the Las Vegas strip, concentrating all of the Federal Republic's seediness in one place. Seven days a week, Bild pumped free-market mantras, alongside ads for car tyres and chicken wings, into the stiff arteries of cold war West Germany. Bild decried long hair on men and the marriage of its top models to foreigners. It genuflected before South African apartheid, Greek dictatorship, Bavarian sedans and American Pershing missiles. Above all, Bild dedicated itself to the destruction of communist East Germany, and fought a long battle against what it viewed as enemy collaborators in the leftist student movement at home.

TODAY BILD IS PARADOXICALLY LESS INFLUENTIAL THAN IT WAS IN THE 60S, but more politically important. "I read it first in the morning because it is the agenda-setter," says Josef Joffe, the publisher-editor of the liberal weekly Die Zeit. "Politicos in Berlin probably read it first in the morning as well." The paper enjoys a close relationship with the German political elite. The former German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, was one of the best men at the wedding of former Bild editor Kai Diekmann, and in 2008, Diekmann performed the same role for Kohl at his wedding. "Kohl rules with Bild," the Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll wrote, and Kohl's successor as chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, affirmed the practice: "To govern I need Bild, Bild Sunday's edition, and the telly," he once said.

Bild's intimate relationship with some of Germany's most powerful figures is a vestige of its days as the country's decisive reputation maker-and-breaker. The former defence minister, now the president of the European commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has shown up at one of Reichelt's dinner parties at the Bild offices in Berlin, and for the past few years Bild has hosted part of the annual Munich Security Conference, the equivalent of Davos for the global defence industry. Although Angela Merkel has not ingratiated herself with the Springer complex - despite receiving early political support from Bild - her husband is nevertheless paid €10,000 a year to grace the board of the non-profit Friede Springer Foundation, named after Axel Springer's widow.

Despite its traditional proximity to power, Bild has mutated into something

Greatest hits

Bild's influence has waned, but it is still a must-read for politicians

power, Bild has mutated into something



beyond a stalwart defender of the German status quo. Now, says Joffe, it is “an equal-opportunity anti-establishment force”. “Previous Bild editors made their alliances more based on personal feeling,” says the journalist Stefan Niggemeier, who in 2004 co-founded the BILDBlog, a website that corrects Bild’s factual errors and misrepresentations. “But Reichelt is different. He is an actually political person.”

Reichelt’s agenda is marked less by novelty than by a chest-crunching resuscitation of Bild’s core commitments: pro-US, pro-Nato, pro-Israel, pro-austerity, pro-capital, anti-Russia, anti-China. According to the Bild worldview, the best way to counter the left is to portray its demands as totalitarian, and the best way to kill off the far right is to cannibalise its grievances. While Bild prints relatively little material that a supporter of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party would object to, Reichelt sees the party as a threat to his effort to remake the German political scene. “We want nothing to do with the imbeciles of the AfD,” he told me. “The way to destroy them is to make room for their voters in what used to be the political mainstream of this country.”

Bild’s main attack targets remain Germany’s “Gutmenschen” – the do-gooders, vegetarians, Greens and 1968ers who are treated as parasites and irritants to Germany’s robust economy and middle class. More recently, the paper’s sights have also turned on Merkel and her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). “The paper’s constant targeting of Merkel, but also its current take on refugees and all sorts of minorities definitely reproduces rhetorical elements of the AfD,” says Fatma Aydemir, a novelist and columnist for the leftwing daily Tageszeitung, known as Taz. In the absence of serious challenges from within Merkel’s own party, or from other parties – she has been chancellor for 14 years, a tenure surpassed only by Kohl and Bismarck – Bild has attempted to make itself into that opposition. Yet any populist challenger finds itself in the hard position of convincing Germans that Merkel’s very successful form of reactive politics has run out of historical steam. “We are the voice of ordinary people,” claims Reichelt. “If we didn’t exist, they would really think the whole system is against them.”

We

PULLED INTO THE FIRE STATION in the proud town of Sprockhövel, about 30km north-east of Düsseldorf, where a few dozen people greeted us, most of them in firefighter gear. Bild beer steins, Bild lighters and other Bild paraphernalia had been laid out on the firefighters’ bar. Reichelt marched out to the garage with the fire engines, where a small table stood. He took a sip of beer, and addressed the group with aplomb.

“It’s an honour to be among you because, as you know, I like to meet our readers face to face,” Reichelt said. He wanted to know why they had become firefighters. “It’s that feeling that we’re brothers,” said one of the younger firefighters. “That we have each other’s back. You don’t get that feeling elsewhere.” Yes, Reichelt agreed, courage was in short supply in Germany. Courage: that was a virtue Bild could get behind.

“The only trouble we have with Bild,” said another, old fireman, “is your picture contest!”

Reichelt made a show of pricking up his ears. “Oh really? Is there something we’re doing wrong? I welcome your criticism!”

“It encourages people to send in the most sensational photos possible, but people block the way to fires because they’re trying to take photos for Bild!”

Reichelt’s face registered the gravity of the charge. He moved like a matador, coaxing anyone else with negative things to say to hurl them at his face. “Look, that’s terrible, and we’ll have to stop that. I’ll get on that immediately,” he told the man who complained

about the photo contest.

After Reichelt had presided over dinner in the firefighters’ hall, we got back into the Mercedes and sped into the dark. I asked him why he goes out of his way for pow-wows with his readership. “Bild is the last national campfire experience in German life,” he told me. “It’s the last thing that Germans can come together for.” It was a curious way of viewing a newspaper that has, for decades, polarised a country otherwise committed to “consensus politics” into two camps: Bild readers and Bild haters. Yet Reichelt delivered this well-greased lump of Springer-speak with what seemed like sincerity.

The experience of reading Bild is a sugar-rush of gossip, accompanied by the clanging gong of headlines. As is traditional, scandals are designated for the front page, but in Bild’s current iteration, fear-mongering appears to be privileged over celebrity soup: “Germany’s most dangerous gang leader is free again” reads a typical headline. Alongside the main stories, the front page also lists the dollar exchange rate and the price of gold, as well as the “winners” and “losers” of the day. A loser might be Prince Charles, whose charity, according to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, may have received dark money from Russians. (“Bild says: black money for blue blood!”) Or a loser might be Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister of Russia, claiming that there is a “large, coordinated campaign” by the German government to fund misinformation in Russia: “Bild says: what nonsense!” Winners tend to be businessmen making big deals or celebrities being nice to children.

As editor, Reichelt sees himself less as a news impresario than as an emotional entrepreneur. “Journalism is basically about emotions, as all of the other news outlets in this country seem to have forgotten,” he told me. Reichelt likes to point out what he sees as the shared delusions of the more “respectable” German press. “Take Merkel,” he said. “Here you have this completely mediocre mind, and the press has created this elaborate mythology around her. That she’s some sort of savage wit in private – which is not true, by the way – and that she’s fantastically clever – which is not true either. She’s just capable of identifying the direction of prevailing winds.”

For Reichelt, Merkel represents the depoliticisation of society, a process that has obscured the faultlines between conservatives and liberals. For almost two decades, at a series of decisive moments, Merkel has deftly stolen her antagonists’ platforms out from under them.

This shape-shifting has made German politics a much more difficult game to play, and Reichelt sees it as his job to restore the old pre-Merkel divisions. To this end, he has made Bild into a loudspeaker for some of the chancellor’s fiercest critics.

The real trouble for Merkel’s rightwing critics within her party, however, is that she remains the most popular politician in the land – with her approval ratings reaching 80% during the coronavirus pandemic, considerably higher than her closest European peers. Meanwhile, their own political position – a kind of xenophobic neoliberalism that would stress the free movement of capital over the free movement of “undesirable” people – has been vigorously touted by the AfD. It will take some doing to wrangle their copyright back.

SINCE HIS EARLIEST TEENAGE YEARS, Reichelt dreamed of becoming the editor of Bild Zeitung. I asked him how someone like himself, born in Hamburg in 1980 – when Bild was still considered radioactive by most teachers and students across Germany – could have concocted such an ambition. “I was born into a family of journalists,” Reichelt told me. “In our household, Axel Springer was a hero, and Heinrich Böll was an enemy.” Reichelt, who perfected his English abroad at Cushing Academy, a boarding school in Massachusetts, looked up to young Bild reporters as bourgeois paladins pitted against the leftwing rabble of 1980s Hamburg, a city teeming with wealth,

'JOURNALISM IS BASICALLY ABOUT EMOTIONS, AS ALL OF THE OTHER NEWS OUTLETS IN THIS COUNTRY SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN'



but also one of the hubs of the country's anarchist left.

"You must understand that Bild was right about the three major questions of postwar German life," Reichelt said. "We backed Israel to the hilt, which you can hardly say for the international left. We backed the USA to the hilt, which the student protesters didn't want. And we were convinced that German reunification could work, unlike those leftist worthies, [Jürgen] Habermas and Günter Grass." Reichelt is correct that Bild had confidence in a reunified Germany that could purge itself of any lingering leftwing utopian residues in the East. "The German left basically gave up on reunification in the 1980s," Niggemeier told me. "The cause became almost quaint for them. Meanwhile, Axel Springer built the Bild headquarters right smack up against the Berlin Wall - and now, look, it's in the middle of Berlin. So they can say: 'We never gave up.'"

It is hard to think of an institution more tightly bound up with the history of the Federal Republic than Bild Zeitung. The first introduction that some young Germans get to the paper today is Günter Wallraff's withering exposé, *Der Aufmacher* (The Leader-writer), which continues to be taught in a few secondary schools four decades after its publication. In 1977, Wallraff went undercover in order to try to expose Bild as a giant fabrication mill. Instead he discovered an underworld of cynical publicists intent on becoming cheerleaders of the postwar German economic boom. In one scene, which describes a regular day at the Bild office, one of the Bild reporters listens to a distressed caller who has called a fake suicide-prevention hotline that Bild has set up, and whispers to Wallraff: "He's about to jump off the balcony any minute, he's nearly there!"

I visited Wallraff last year in his light-filled studio in the Ehrenfeld neighbourhood of Cologne. His office is full of African art, and the books of his heroes, such as Upton Sinclair. "In the 1970s and 80s, Bild was in total control of the media, and there was very little being done about it," Wallraff told me, over a game of ping-pong in his workshop. "If you were their enemy, they made you into a terrorist."

We retreated back into Wallraff's studio, where he had the latest copy of Bild. The headline was about Boris Johnson's hair: "This mop now rules Britain". "I haven't flipped through it in a while," Wallraff

told me. "But I can see it's taken a more civilised tone. You should have seen it in the 1970s: all of the articles in support of the dictatorship in Greece and Chile, the articles in favour of apartheid."

Heinrich Böll devoted not one, but three books, including one of his literary masterpieces - *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* - to denouncing Bild, which he credited not only with poisoning public life, but also with wrecking the German language itself with "primitive *bon-mot*-ism". Bild, wrote Böll in 1972, was "no longer crypto-fascistic, no longer fascisoid, but naked fascism: incitement, lies, garbage".

The most visible element of West Germany's hard left, the Red Army Faction, and its leading voice, Ulrike Meinhof, took Böll's criticism further. In May 1972, after calling for the expropriation of Springer, and holding public hearings against the company, the Red Army Faction bombed the Axel Springer offices in Hamburg, injuring at least 17 people. Meinhof declared the attacks were in the name of Springer's victims: communists, Palestinians, foreign workers.

That was almost 50 years ago. After the cold war, Bild became a celebrity rag, which former adversaries could dismiss as a more innocuous symptom of a depoliticised culture than an ideological lodestar in its own right.

Reichelt took over Bild in 2018, after his immediate predecessor, Tanit Koch, who tried to steer the paper in a more anodyne, Merkel-friendly direction, left the position. Under Reichelt's tenure, the paper quickly established itself as a battering ram against Merkel. Bild once again plays the game of guiding and reflecting public opinion on a host of questions. Among its enthusiasms are German cars and the arms industry. "At last! The Leopard-2 tank in Idlib and possibly soon in the fight against Assad's Russian tanks (T-55, T-62, T-72 and T-90)," tweeted Bild's political editor about recent events in Syria. "As always, it takes a Turk to use a German tank for what it was built for."

In the higher echelons of German media, Reichelt is perhaps best known for his dogfights on Twitter, where, until recently at least, he spent a lot of time. "You never win anything on Twitter," he told me, a bit mournfully, like a recovering addict. On the platform, Reichelt can still be relied upon to submit world events to the logic of the Marvel universe. "Runaway Ed" Snowden is "the hero of global terrorism". Trump's assassination of the Iranian military leader Qassem Suleimani "freed the world of a monster".

There are a few non-populist positions Reichelt takes that have the appearance of principle. "He has staked out anti-Putin, pro-Nato, pro-Israel positions well beyond the standard German line," says Niggemeier. But the majority of the paper's content is an ever-shifting attempt to harness popular discontent rather than indoctrinate readers in any specific programme. Reichelt himself has, for instance, repeatedly come to Merkel's defence on her decision not to close the border to Syrian refugees in 2015, describing it as an ethical "no-brainer", but the paper goes to great lengths to associate migrants with crime, and to demand deportations.



THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT, Bild echoes the calls of prominent German centrist liberals who believe Germany must assume a leading role in world affairs. "You have this ongoing performance whereby they call for Germany to be in the middle of the action, but have no sense of responsibility for what that would entail," says *Blätter* editor Albrecht von Lucke.

"As soon as you have German troops deployed anywhere, even on the most humanitarian mission imaginable, who will be the first to cry out about it when the first guys fall in the war? Who will demand they come home and that it's all been a mistake? Bild. You can count on that." It is the same mentality that led one Bavarian AfD politician earlier this year to tweet against the banning of a beer festival because of Covid-19 - only to go on to sue the city of



Rosenheim for the rise in cases after the beer festival did take place.

The coronavirus pandemic initially caught Bild - and the German right - off guard. After the government's strong response to the crisis, Merkel seemed immune to criticism. Bild turned its focus to China. In April, Reichelt published a public letter demanding €149bn in reparations from Beijing for the economic impact of Covid-19. "You shut down every newspaper and website that is critical of your rule," Reichelt wrote in the letter, "but not the stalls where bat soup is sold." The stunt made headlines around the world, and predictably enraged the Chinese embassy in Berlin. It's this willingness to play fast and loose with geopolitics, now in a populist vein, that makes Bild, according to Von Lucke, "much more dangerous than it ever was before".

'We're

READ BY MORE GERMAN PROFESSORS than any other publication," Reichelt told me when I visited his office in the Axel Springer building in Berlin last year. "We're read by the businessmen and the workers - and if some read us for ironic reasons, well, that's fine, too."

With its smartly dressed assistants and ample supply of alcohol, Bild's headquarters in Berlin succeeds in transmitting a throwback aura. "In case there's any doubt that I'm a real tabloid editor," Reichelt said, flashing me his lighter with a naked woman on it.

For the daily editorial meeting, we entered a conference room, where about 12 staffers were seated around a long table, overlooking the Berlin skyline. "What have we got?" Reichelt asked. An image of Ursula von der Leyen was displayed on a big screen. "Can we give her a bit more brightness in her face?" asked one of the women at the table. "She looks a bit lugubrious." "There we go, there we go - more gravitas now," said another woman.

"Can I get a show of hands of how many of you are for the proposed speed limit?" Reichelt asked his lieutenants. Merkel's government was threatening to impose a speed limit on German cars. A few hands went up. "God, it's just like the country at large - we're completely divided on this," Reichelt said. "Why are you against it?" He trained his eyes on an editor.

"People just drive too fast. I'm tired of being scared on the autobahn when a car comes by doing 200km/h."

"The trouble is that if you lower the speed limit I can't make it to Hamburg in two hours any more," another editor said.

"You drive to Hamburg in two hours? That's insane: maybe there *should* be a limit," Reichelt joked.

The trouble with the speed limit, Reichelt later told me in private, was that it interfered with the fundamental German ideal of freedom, which is that, within the rules, you can do what you want. "There are too many Germans now waking up to find that if they eat meat and love their car, they're suddenly Nazis," Reichelt said. "And that's exactly how the German left speaks. They speak of their fellow

'IN CASE THERE'S ANY DOUBT, I'M A REAL TABLOID EDITOR,' REICHELT SAID, FLASHING ME HIS LIGHTER WITH A NAKED WOMAN ON IT



Paper magnate

Axel Springer, the legendary German publisher
KEYSTONE PRESS/ALAMY

citizens as *criminals*, as people committing crimes against future generations, and they even want to see if they can perhaps introduce punishments - to formally make this into a crime. But what about all those people who aren't waiting for the delivery of their new Tesla?"

Next year will almost certainly be Merkel's last as chancellor. She has already relinquished her position as the secretary of the CDU. When it came to the struggle to determine her successor last year - specifically, who would fill the role of secretary - Reichelt personally favoured the millionaire businessman Friedrich Merz over Merkel's chosen successor, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. But Reichelt has-tened to point out that his favourites don't get special treatment in Bild. "Did I want Merz to replace Merkel? Probably. Did we hesitate to destroy him? No. Bild ran the interview that *fatally* damaged his campaign when he claimed he was a millionaire but still middle-class. The power to destroy is Bild's most valuable weapon, and I would not sacrifice it for anything - not even my own political preferences." It was a nice line, but Reichelt's resort to journalistic principle seemed a convenient way to gloss an interview that had, quite unexpectedly, taken on a life of its own.

The last time I saw Reichelt in his office, last summer, he wanted to talk about his preferred enemies. "There is Putin," he told me. "He wants to weaken our German institutions and interfere with our elections. You know why? Because he knows he lives in a piece-of-shit country - that he has made his country into shit - and so he wants other countries to come down to his level so that his disastrous record can be less easily seen."

Before he could get any further in his diatribe, a Bild reporter lunged into the office. "Piëch is dead," he announced. The family owner of Porsche, Ferdinand Piëch, had apparently died.

"Really? Piëch?" Reichelt said. "How?"

"In a pizzeria," said the reporter. "It seems it was a heart attack."

"That's fantastic. A pizza restaurant!"

"It seems so."

Piëch had not died in a pizzeria after all, we learned a few moments later, somewhat to Reichelt's annoyance. But then he quickly picked back up the thread. "Then we have the spineless left at home, that just wants to let Putin and Assad run roughshod over the whole liberal western order. They want to bring the German car industry to a screeching halt, freeze rents in Berlin, starve the economy and keep Germany from doing anything in the world. I remember meeting with some people here in the defence ministry when I got back from covering the war in Syria. Let's build a no-fly zone in northern Syria, I said. Let's go do it alone if we have to. But no one in Germany with power knows how to use it - or even wants to use it."

"What about Bild?" I asked.

"With Bild," Reichelt smiled, "it's the other way around." ●

THOMAS MEANEY IS A HISTORIAN AND AUTHOR



Comment is free, facts are sacred CP Scott 1918

45

RAFAEL BEHR

Brexit will
leave Britain
globally bereft

Page 47 →

Opinion



POLITICS

*To guarantee the end of Trump,
Biden must win by a landslide*

Jonathan Freedland

DREWANGERER/GETTY



24 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly

pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY: ORIGINAL COPY:
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW

Were we not spooked by what happened in 2016, we'd find it easier to say out loud that all signs point to the defeat and removal of Donald Trump on 3 November. Superstition and a desire not to tempt fate hold us back, but the signs are plentiful. The most obvious is the polls, which show not only that Joe Biden is ahead of Trump by double-digit margins, but also that 72% of Americans believe their country is on the wrong track - a number that spells ruin for any incumbent.

Of course, we learned four years ago that national polls don't matter - after all, Hillary Clinton led in those - and what really counts are the contests in the battleground states: the likes of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan. Biden is handily ahead in all of those, too. Could those polls be wrong? One expert reckons Biden is so far in front that even if the polls are as wrong now as they were in 2016 he will still win.

More important, these numbers reflect something solid. Naturally, liberals have been appalled by Trump's behaviour since day one, but mere outrage and scandal have proved insufficient to sink his presidency. Now, though, he is associated with genuine catastrophe. More than 140,000 Americans are dead from coronavirus, with caseloads rising in 41 of 50 states. Trump's handling of this disaster has so obviously made it worse that he has made the case for his own removal more powerfully than any rival. His one hope was a healthy economy, but that too now lies in ruins. His racial dogwhistling is also costing him: surveys suggest that, outside his base, Americans recoil at Trump's widening of that divide. It means Trump's unpopularity is not ephemeral but anchored in facts that will be hard to shift.

Given all that, surely the rational response is to look forward to Trump's imminent departure from office? To which the right answer is: not so fast. To remove Trump, it will not be enough for Biden to win. He has to win big.

By that, I don't mean that thanks to voter suppression - fewer polling places in majority-black neighbourhoods and the like - Democrats have to be several points ahead merely to draw level, though that is true. Nor do I mean that Biden can only overturn Trumpism by riding a wave so big that Democrats take back the Senate and therefore avoid being thwarted by Mitch McConnell for four gridlocked years, though that is also true. Or that Biden needs a wide enough margin to withstand the foreign hacking and disruption efforts in Trump's favour

“*The fundamental threat is that Trump will lose - and refuse to go. He has already laid out his rationale*

that most monitors expect, having concluded that when Russian agents poked around voter registration databases in 2016, they were merely “casing the joint” for a more sustained offensive in 2020 - though that too is true.

No, what I have in mind is a threat more fundamental. The danger is that Trump will lose - and refuse to go.

He's already laid out his rationale. “Rigged 2020 election,” he tweeted last month. “Millions of mail-in ballots will be printed by foreign countries, and others. It will be the scandal of our times!” Here's the scenario Trump is planning for. On the evening of 3 November, he loses the popular vote by a margin even greater than the 3 million votes by which Hillary beat him in 2016 - but the count of votes cast on the day puts him narrowly ahead in one or two key states. He promptly declares victory, claiming that the millions of votes that were cast as absentee ballots - by voters anxious to avoid polling stations because of Covid-19 - should be disqualified as fraudulent. He has a motive to do that, since mail-in votes often skew Democratic. And he has a precedent for it: in a tight senate race in Florida in 2018, Trump urged the state to stop counting the votes and go with the election night results, which favoured Republicans.

Let's say he makes that same move in the three midwestern battlegrounds in November. Republicans are in charge of the state legislatures in all three. Those Republican legislatures could refuse both to certify their state results and to send a slate of representatives to the electoral college, which has to meet by 14 December. Biden's lawyers would plead his case all the way to the supreme court, but that court likes to stay out of elections. It could plausibly instruct the electoral college to meet on 14 December, with or without the disputed states. If it meets without them, and neither Trump nor Biden can reach the 270 electoral college votes required to win, then the constitution throws the question to the House of Representatives. Democrats control that body, but here's the thing. Under the rules, the House would make its decision state-by-state, with one vote per state - so that tiny Republican Wyoming would have as much say as populous, Democratic California. By that count, Republican states would outvote Democratic ones by 26 to 24 - and Trump would remain.

✱ **Jonathan Freedland** is a *Guardian* columnist. Granted, this is a nightmare scenario, but if these past four years have taught us anything, it's that nightmares can come true. There's only one guaranteed defence against such a possibility, and that is for Biden to win a blowout victory. Which is why efforts such as those by the Lincoln Project and Republican Voters Against Trump could be significant: they make it legitimate for conservatives, independents and, yes, lifelong Republicans to lend their vote to the Democratic candidate. Of course Democrats, whether of the left or centre, also have to turn out in colossal numbers, if not to elect Biden then to remove Trump.

Every vote will count this time because of the unique nature of this president. Make no mistake, it will take a landslide to get Trump out ●

POLITICS

Brexit was meant to make Britain global. Instead, it's friendless

Rafael Behr



It is not a secret that Britain is leaving the EU. The coronavirus crisis has dominated 2020, but not obliterated memory of the years before. Still, to be on the safe side, the government is spending £93m (\$116m) on a Brexit refresher campaign with the slogan “check, change, go”. This is aimed at people who have dealings with Europe and might be under the illusion that it will be as easy in the future as it has been in the past. No one has done more to cultivate that misapprehension than Boris Johnson. The government’s new message on Brexit is to disregard what the prime minister used to say on the subject.

Brexit can make EU membership go away, but not the EU itself. When the only problem was being inside, escape was the only solution worth talking about. Hardline Eurosceptics were no more bothered by how an ex-member state might manage relations with Brussels than arsonists are interested in what to do with ashes.

As a result of that complacency, the UK does not have a policy towards the EU, only an impulse away from it. No one followed us out. The fire did not catch.

It is important to distinguish strategic European policy from the detail of borders, tariffs and regulations. The UK has an agenda for that stuff and negotiations are ongoing. If those talks fail, there is always the World Trade Organization. But even if it were economically sensible to fall back on WTO rules, the question of Britain’s geopolitical alignment would still remain. The rubric for the talks is “the future relationship”,

but the UK has narrowed the discussion to exclude everything apart from trade.

The UK position is consistent with the Eurosceptic doctrine of pristine sovereignty. In that view, EU institutions eat national power. Every programme, even something as ostensibly benign as the Erasmus scheme for student exchanges, is a trap. The whole point of new “global” Britain, as an upgrade from the old European version, is that it is freer to deal with other global players.

The limitations of that approach are quickly becoming clear. In January, the government announced that it would allow Huawei, the Chinese telecoms company, a limited role in developing British 5G infrastructure. Last week, the limit became an exclusion, starting next year.

The shift follows pressure on Johnson from Tory MPs who complain, with good reason, that Huawei has the potential to be a conduit for Beijing security interests and want its kit stripped out of the UK network even sooner. The more decisive factor is US sanctions against the company and the demand from Washington that Britain be more demonstrative in its transatlantic loyalty. The unambiguous message from the White House is that trade and security policy are intertwined.

Any prime minister would prioritise the security alliance with the US over a commercial deal with China. But Johnson happens to be the first prime minister to be confronted with the choice in stark, binary terms, because his trade policy is a blank sheet of paper and Donald Trump is holding the pen.

Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

As an EU member, Britain’s trade deals were brokered by the European commission, which mobilised the scale of the single market as leverage in negotiations. That is what concessions in national sovereignty buy – and every government that has felt the benefits considers it a price worth paying. The UK was no exception.

In less volatile times, an independent seat at the WTO would have been meagre compensation for losing Britain’s influence as one of the big three EU members. As international trade policy gets ever deeper submerged in geopolitical manoeuvres, that swap looks like the worst part-exchange in strategic history.

Johnson knows it, too. If the prime minister thought the WTO is where the action happens, he would nominate a credible, intelligent statesman with a reputation for probity as Britain’s candidate to be the next director-general. He offered Liam Fox instead.

The UK is sliding into a strategic void because its only foreign policy is a plan that devalues old European alliances and shifts the balance of power to other continents. Johnson cannot address this challenge without exposing the basic flaw in Brexit, which is that the sovereignty he so jealously demands from Brussels buys no clout in Washington, Beijing or anywhere else.

The UK national interest requires a new strategic partnership with the EU, but Johnson refuses even to include that concept in the negotiation. The obstacle used to be confidence that Britain had no need of Europe. It looks now more like fear of admitting how much of Europe Britain still needs ●

Illustration Andrzej Krauze

24 July 2020 The Guardian Weekly



COVID-19



Where have we heard Boris Johnson's new slogan before?

Marina Hyde

A fortnight ago, the UK government launched its scheme to entice people back into cafes and restaurants, beneath the banner "Eat Out to Help Out". This is the sort of unforeseen innuendo that happens if you leave the sloganeering to people who - in some ineffable way - regard going down on someone as essentially leftwing.

In light of developments, that unfortunate slogan takes on more of a hectoring tone, as Boris Johnson mounts another podium to strongly suggest there will be a return to "virtual normality" by November, "hopefully

in time for Christmas". Over by Christmas - another interesting slogan, there, from a government not even clever enough to realise it's not clever enough.

Either way, it's time for all worker ants to get back to their offices if they can. Or, as Johnson's chief scientific officer said last Thursday, there is "absolutely no reason" to change advice to work from home. This was the appearance before a Commons committee by Patrick "herd immunity" Vallance, who, like former England football manager, Glenn Hoddle, now seems to think he never said them things.

Vallance certainly seems to have missed the announcement from chancellor Rishi Sunak, who last week warned sluggish consumer units - "people", in the old parlance - that the economic recovery would fail unless Britons finally got back into the shops and restaurants.

Please do enjoy the spectacle of the Conservative-run state commanding its populace to participate in capitalism. It's semi-optional, for now, though I'd like to think the participation drive will swiftly escalate into backbench MPs being instructed to motor round the streets of their constituencies with a PA system blasting out the message: "YOU MUST RETURN TO THE MARKET ECONOMY." Commuter commandants to be introduced by October.

UK PARLIAMENT/JESSICA
TAYLOR / PA WIRE

Still, what's the worst that could happen? In fact, there is perverse good news for health secretary Matt Hancock, who has recently looked like the central character in a short story about a man who starts haunting himself. According to a paper by two Oxford academics, it's possible that Public Health England has significantly overestimated Covid-19 death statistics by including former sufferers who could have subsequently died of other causes.

Hancock has ordered an urgent inquiry, which shows us that he CAN order urgent inquiries. The public inquiry into the government's fiascoid handling of the coronavirus is pencilled in for before winter - just not this winter.

Speaking of eccentric accounting methods, there are question marks over the spending announcements unveiled seemingly five times a week by Sunak. Some suspect the same money keeps being produced with élan, then produced again with further flourish. Those who got to the sealed section in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations will know that this is actually known as the Biscuit Mill model.

It's based on an episode of British children's classic Bagpuss where the mice claim to have a biscuit mill, but in fact have only one chocolate digestive that they roll off their production line, wheel round the back, then roll off again, and so on. (Incidentally, I must confess that I myself have previously used this metaphor, making it a sort of meta-metaphor about the covert recycling of limited material.)

*** Marina Hyde** is a Guardian columnist

The episode plays out with the mice eventually being exposed by Professor Yaffle. Who, in this latest case, is played by Paul Johnson of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. He said last Thursday that Sunak's attempt to disguise old money as new money was "corrosive to public trust", adding that "the 'Rooseveltian' additional £5.5bn (\$7bn) of capital spending represents an increase of precisely zero this year on budget plans".

As with Johnson's performance last Thursday morning and in recent days, none of it can really be said to fill one with confidence. Which, for a man whose sole political talent is supposed to be filling people with confidence, feels ominous.

Johnson increasingly comes across as a public speaker of dazzling inagility.

Consider the moment at prime minister's questions last week when Labour leader Keir Starmer asked him if he had a message for the bereaved families of coronavirus victims. As a spectator, your only thought is: don't do the joke now. Just say a message for the dead people. But Johnson was powerless to resist himself.

The leader of the opposition needed to decide which brief he was going to take, he began ... *Don't do it now. Don't do it now. Don't do it now.* "Because at the moment - *please please please don't do it now* - "he's got more briefs than Calvin Klein!"

There it is. Another premature ejaculation by the prime minister - as the promise of this all being over by Christmas may very well turn out to be ●

*China will make the UK
pay for its Huawei decision,
but a rethink is essential*

There is no doubt that China will make Britain pay for stripping Huawei from the 5G network. When Beijing said that the reversal “must come at a cost”, it didn’t mean the £2bn (\$2.5bn) bill cited by the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden; and it sees the UK’s stance on Hong Kong as an aggravating factor. The question is how high the price will be, and how precisely the UK will pay.

The UK is coming into line with other Five Eyes intelligence-sharing nations, the US and Australia, by rejecting Huawei, but could set a new direction in Europe.

Beijing is also fighting on multiple fronts. The imposition of a draconian security law on Hong Kong has caused an international backlash and highlighted other issues, including Beijing's treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang and its increasingly harsh line on Taiwan. Its biggest battle is with Washington; last Tuesday, Donald Trump signed an order rescinding Hong Kong's special economic status with America. China is also struggling with Australia, over Canberra's calls for an independent inquiry into coronavirus and the offer of permanent residency to some Hongkongers; with Canada, over Huawei; and with India, which has banned dozens of Chinese apps after a deadly border clash. Relations with the EU are becoming more fraught.

But this proliferation of struggles reflects Beijing's increasing confidence. Britain also looks a good deal weaker than the last time China froze it out, following David Cameron's meeting with the Dalai Lama.

Back then, trade actually increased, and diplomatic relations continued at lower levels. But George Osborne's subsequent push for a "golden relationship", with human rights and other concerns low on the agenda as long as the money kept flowing, suggested that the UK will cave whenever it feels the heat.

We can expect more than diplomatic snubs this time. Australia's example is interesting; it faces a ban on some exports, has hinted that China could be behind a cyber-attack, and recently told its citizens that they could risk arbitrary detention if they travelled to China. British businesses might well find they face new obstacles operating in China: HSBC had reportedly warned Downing Street that it could face reprisals if Huawei was blocked from the UK's critical infrastructure. That sounded, if anything, rather like a disincentive to keep using the Chinese firm. Why offer further leverage for the future?

But a broader reconsideration is needed, with countries looking at how we came to the point where Huawei was regarded as almost indispensable for 5G, while China would not allow a foreign firm to play an equivalent role in its infrastructure. It might be convenient for the intelligence services to portray this as a failure of industrial policy but there is also truth in the charge. It is time to consider what the UK's technological and manufacturing priorities should be, where Britain's companies should be concentrating their efforts, and how they can be encouraged to do so.



Spotlight on West Bank by Rosie Scammell and Sufian Taha (10 July) was a very sad but important report on the dire plight of Palestinians in Jericho and the Jordan Valley. News from Palestine is rarely covered in the Australian mainstream media and when it is, it's often from the Israeli point of view.

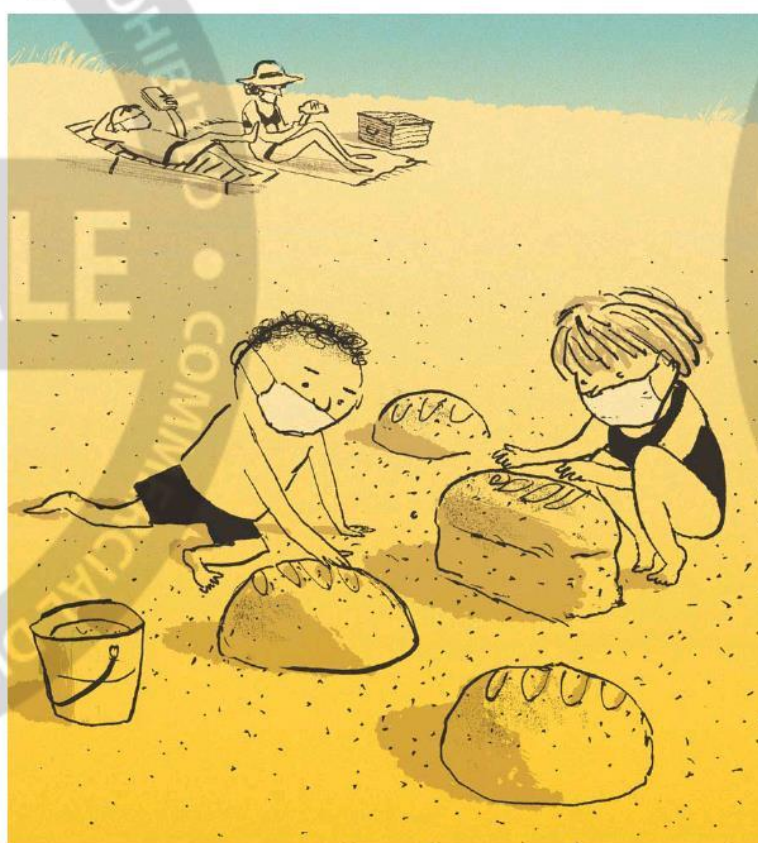
Like Nelson Mandela, I regard the Palestine issue as one of the greatest moral issues of our time. Many governments don't care about the suffering of the dispossessed and displaced Palestinian people and the ongoing brutal occupation and oppression.

Journalists have always played a key role as the conscience when great wrongs are happening in the world. Such reports will, I'm sure, contribute to progress towards a just solution of the Palestinian tragedy.

The enemy of your enemy might not be your friend

I expect better from the Guardian than quoting and platforming the talking points of neoconservative warmongers like Bill Kristol (Trump v reality, 3 July). As of late the Never Trumpers have made strange bedfellows for the supposed centre-left media. By giving them space you are lending legitimacy to their causes.

Merely a shared dislike of Trump is not enough. Failure to ask why they hate him is simply lazy journalism. Kristol and his ilk represent American exceptionalism and empire; their disdain for Trump originates in his



BERGER & WYSE

2016 campaign's break
with that orthodoxy.

A dangerous precedent of the Trump era is the media's embrace of these rightwing ideologues and a casual amnesia about the chaos unleashed on the world when they last held power. The enemy of your enemy is not necessarily your friend.

Matthew Pierce,
Castlegar,
British Columbia, Canada

American individualism has a dark dimension

It was with sadness that I read America thirst (3 July) about how many people in the US have no access to clean running water. This is another symptom of the malaise that has made the country the coronavirus capital of the world.

Private wealth and public squalor are sweeping the globe with more destructive consequences than the pandemic.

Behind this is our alienation from one another. Divided we fall.

Of all countries

America has taken this individualism to the extreme. Of all presidents Trump is the great divider, fanning fear of others.

The same centrifugal force is spinning us away from our connection to the natural world. The best that can be said is that the worse it gets, the more people will wake up to the problem.

*Edward Butterworth,
Victoria, British Columbia,
Canada*

End of London's boom may help ordinary people

Your piece, Will the WFH boom topple the London skyscraper? (3 July), gave me a grim sense of hope that the building of these monuments to greed might have had its day. I came of age in 1960s and 70s London, when it was tatty but vibrant. In the last 20 years I have watched from afar this city, which I still love, being taken over by money, the centre emptied of ordinary people, and the atmosphere changed.

Is it too much to

hope that many of the less ostentatious office buildings, emptied of workers, might be converted to affordable living space for ordinary people?

Money might flow away, London might lose what the historian Tony Judt called its “techy sheen”, but it could once again become an exciting - and affordable - place to live.

Michael Morice,
Weaverville,
North Carolina, US

Where would America be without the super-rich?

Where would Americans be without our generous millionaires (Super-rich want to pay higher taxes, 17 July)? Living in a country with - for starters - universal healthcare, good public education, affordable housing and a functioning social safety net. But then they wouldn't be quite so rich - pity. The hypocrisy of these people is as limitless as their bank accounts.

*Cate Wiley,
New York, New York, US*

Greedy capitalists to blame for women's plight

Linda Scott concludes her piece on the continuing inequalities endemic in women's pay by blaming "hostile men and the institutions they create" (17 July).

A more productive explanation for continuing unacceptable gender pay inequality might be greedy capitalists and the corporations they create. I reckon the latter explanation provides a better basis for the public policy required to eliminate gender pay inequality.

Stewart Sweeney,
Adelaide, South Australia

WRITE
TO US

Letters for publication

weekly.letters@
theguardian.com

Please include a full postal address and a reference to the article.

We may edit letters. Submission and publication of all letters is subject to our terms and conditions, see: GU.COM/LETTERS-TERMS

Editorial

*Editor: Will Dean
Guardian Weekly,
Kings Place,
90 York Way,
London N1 9GU,
UK*

To contact the editor directly:

editorial.feedback
@theguardian.com

Corrections

Our policy is to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please write to guardian.readers@theguardian.com or the readers' editor, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU, UK



Film, music, art, books & more

51

MUSIC

The Chicks
draw a line
under Dixie

Page 54 →

Culture



CURTAINS WITHDRAWN

New direction

The auditorium
of the Berliner
Ensemble with
a third of the
seats removed

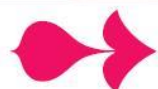
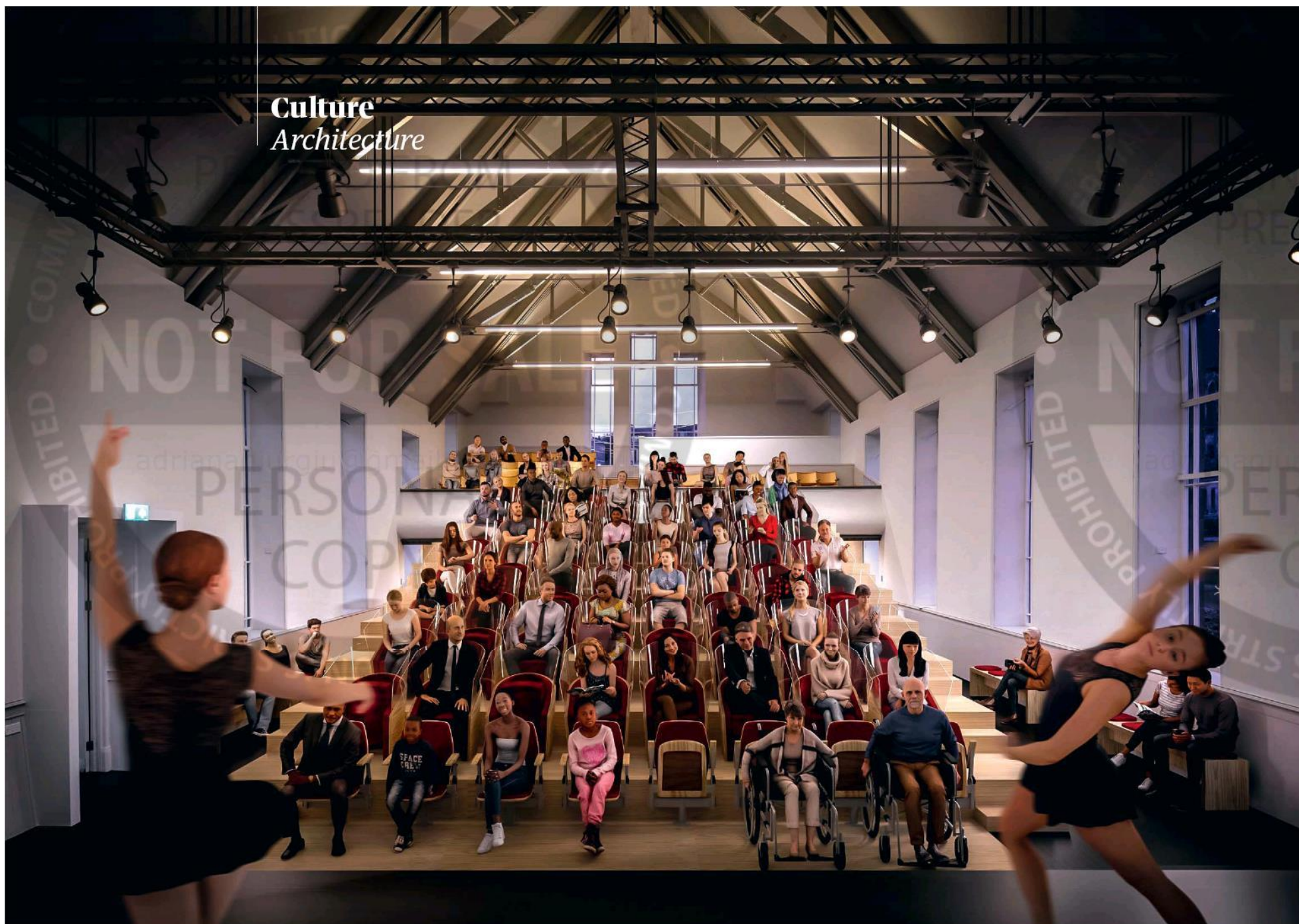
CLEMENS BILAN/EPA

Wraparound screens, touring deckchair pop-ups, and rooftop suction
devices... what on earth are theatres going to look like in a Covid-19 world?



 pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW



By Oliver
Wainwright

▲ **Together apart**
John McAslan's
reimagining of
how Dunoon's
Burgh Hall will
put on shows
under current
Covid restrictions

EDMUND SUMNER/JOHN
MCASLAN + PARTNERS/
CHARCOALBLUE/PHIL
COTTRELL

Packed shoulder to shoulder with your neighbour, elbows jostling for position on the armrest, knees pressed up against the seat in front, your view blocked by a column – the West End theatre experience can be claustrophobic at the best of times. Now that theatres have been given the green light to reopen, with their share of a £1.5bn (\$1.9bn) support fund in the offing, how on earth can these historic venues adapt to a socially distanced post-Covid future?

For Cameron Mackintosh, the hit musical producer and owner of eight historic theatres in London's West End, it's an impossible prospect. "Until social distancing doesn't exist any more, we can't even plan to reopen," he said in June, when he announced that all of his venues would remain shuttered until at least 2021. For an industry that relies on packing people in as tightly as possible to create an electric atmosphere, social distancing is surely its death-knell.

Scottish architect John McAslan thinks there might be another way, and that theatre designers are well placed to rise to the challenge. "Architecture seems to have been lost in any kind of strategy," he says. "There's been an acceptance of the problem, and a lack of imagination in terms of looking at how it could be done differently."

McAslan, architect of the celebrated Roundhouse in Camden, London, has been working on designs for a new kind of theatre seat for a small community venue in his home town of Dunoon in Argyll, which he thinks could be a prototype for countless other venues. Dunoon's Burgh Hall was the first theatre in the region when it opened in 1874, and it might now be the site of the first post-viral theatre seat.

"It's a bit like a 1930s lounge seat," McAslan explains. "It's slightly wider than a usual theatre seat and double-raked, with each row separated by two steps rather than one." The chief visible difference is a removable transparent acrylic screen that wraps around the sides and back of each seat, providing a psychological buffer between members of the audience, if not a full-height cough-proof barrier. "It's to give a sense of visual connection, but physical separation," says McAslan. "Part of this is getting people feeling comfortable with the idea of sitting side by side with strangers again."

After falling into disrepair for decades, the Burgh Hall has taken on a new life as a contemporary arts centre since it was refurbished in 2017, and has remained active through the lockdown, with volunteers leading a community kitchen for the town. McAslan sees the new seating plan (which is still awaiting funding) as a pilot project for how other venues could be reconfigured across the UK. In his eyes, the pandemic is an opportunity to improve a range of practical issues that have long plagued antiquated auditoria.

"The West End is full of wonderful historic theatres, but they're now completely outmoded," he says. "People are four inches [10cm] taller than when they were built, so the seats are too small, the sight lines are terrible and a huge number of seats are restricted by columns. The air is bad and the loos and bars are always too small to cope. With the government's funding announcement, now is the time to make them fit for purpose."

Gavin Green, co-founder of theatre consultancy Charcoalblue, has been working with a number of theatres to consider their reopening strategies. "The situation has changed dramatically in recent weeks," he says. "In early June there was an experiment in Berlin to strip out a theatre

auditorium to two-metre spacing between the seats, and I think it scared the crap out of everyone. It looked so stark and empty."

He says the recent relaxation in UK government guidance to one-metre distancing could be a game-changer. "It changes a theatre's potential capacity from about 33% to more like 67%, which begins to look possible. It's still not quite enough to make the top-end commercial shows stack up, but it starts to look like a real audience, rather than playing to an empty room." In practical terms, it is the difference between removing three seats in every four, compared with just one. In most theatres, every other row would no longer have to be removed.

Green has also been working on plans for a touring outdoor pop-up deckchair theatre, made from an easily disassembled kit of parts. "The key thing is to keep it simple," he says. "The moment you go outdoors, you're talking huge sums of money with lighting and rigging, but we need something light on its feet."

He points to an example in Leeds, by the Holbeck community theatre Slung Low, which recently laid on a family-friendly performance in a car park on the back of a flatbed lorry. Each family had a little blue tent and a pair of chairs, roped off in a safely distanced grid with festive bunting.

"This was not a reopening of our theatre," says Slung Low's artistic director, Alan Lane, explaining it was a continuation of their work leading social care in the area. "Every day we deliver hot meals to 20 families in our local area, feeding 65 children. We've seen how they have coped with the time away from school, the impact of legislation, the diet of sausage and chips four days a week and the endless tension in the air. So we decided we would do something that might help - a date to look forward to, a change of activity, a moment of respite."

Set designer Es Devlin agrees that this is a time to be fundamentally rethinking the wider role that theatre can have, and look at how existing theatre infrastructure could be adapted to better serve a broader public audience.

"West End theatre buildings occupy the most central city locations and yet are only open to the public for around three hours on most days," she says. "Their architecture still expresses a time when it was socially acceptable for those on lower incomes to be funnelled through their own separate entrance. We've been asking: could they be altered, in the same way that Victorian and Edwardian housing is so regularly remodelled, to give more direct access from the stage to the street? Could the top tier of seats with the worst views be converted into a civic space where a community might gather pre and post-show? Could we pierce through the walls to create a shop window, where stage sets become magnificent artworks viewed from the street through art gallery windows?"

Devlin has form in reimagining what theatre can be. She has authored some of the world's most audacious



◀ **Open up**
Es Devlin, designer of Miley Cyrus's Bangerz tour, wants the form and function of theatre buildings rethought entirely

DON ARNOLD/WIREIMAGE

production designs, from a rotating glass box for the Lehman Trilogy to a gigantic tongue-shaped slide for Miley Cyrus's stadium tour, and she is already working on what a socially distanced arena audience might look like.

"We have been trying to find beauty within the new and necessary audience geometry for stadium concerts," she says, "by overlaying projected linear patterns that both guide the audience to safe viewing spaces, and also form a beautiful network when viewed from an aerial camera." She imagines this aerial view of the audience could be projection-mapped as a backdrop to the performance on stage, "so the audience taking responsibility for one another's health becomes a visual statement in itself. In a way it's a kind of renewal of the vows between audience and performer - a move away from audience as customer or consumer."

Ray Winkler, director of entertainment architects Stufish, longstanding designers of stages for the Rolling Stones, U2 and Madonna, strikes a note of caution. He thinks that post-Covid venues can only be as good as their weakest link - the surrounding infrastructure concertgoers use to get there. "The question is more psychological than physical," he says. "You could have a perfectly good venue, but you still have to get on to public transport, or queue with 5,000 other people, or have massively long entry times. It's not to say we can't rise to that challenge, but we can't just be greasing one cog at the expense of looking at the overall mechanism."

Steve Tompkins, the co-founder of architects Haworth Tompkins who was named the most influential person in British theatre last year, is cautiously optimistic. Having completed countless UK theatre projects, the practice is now working on a new research and performance building for the American Repertory theatre at Harvard University. The architects have been working alongside the Harvard School of Public Health, looking at how theatres might mitigate the coronavirus risk before a vaccine comes along.

"It has allowed us to use the project as a live research test bed," says Tompkins, "asking what theatres might have to do in a time of pandemics - which might not just be this one." He says that displacement ventilation is one of the key principles, so that fresh air comes in from below and is exhausted through the roof, along with better filtration, and slightly higher humidity and temperature. He points to the technical interventions planned by the London Palladium, which proposes to introduce infrared cameras at the stage door along with antiviral fogging machines and an app-based "medical passport" for ticket-holders.

"Theatre makers are incredibly resourceful and designers are incredibly imaginative at making theatres work," he says. "I don't feel pessimistic. With the relief with the funding, I believe it will unleash a wave of new creativity and imagination." ●

OLIVER WAINWRIGHT IS THE GUARDIAN'S ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN CRITIC

It starts to look like a real audience, rather than playing to an empty room

◀ **Pop-up performance**
Slung Low's Leeds experiment in post-lockdown theatre using a flat-bed truck and tents



24 July 2020 **The Guardian Weekly**

DRIVING IT DOWN

MUSIC

The Chicks have ditched the Dixie for their first album since 2006. And the Texas trio are still not ready to make nice

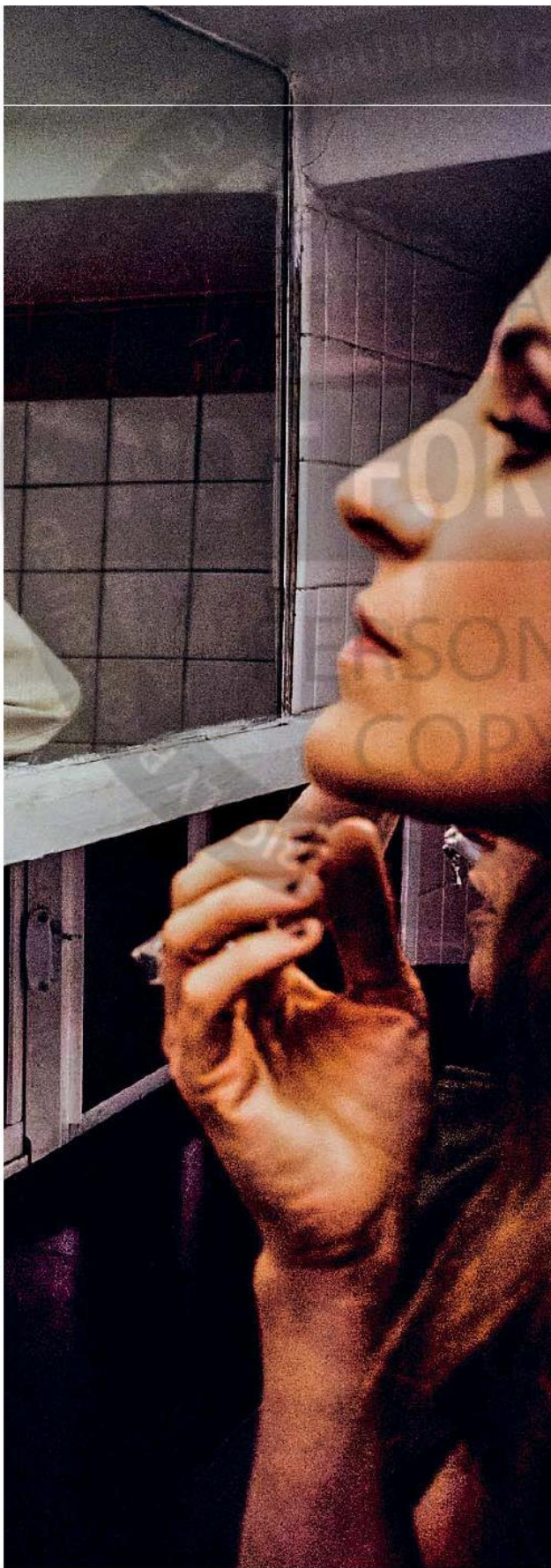
By Laura Snapes

When the Dixie Chicks signed to Sony in 1995, the label worried that their name was politically incorrect. At the time, the bosses were more concerned about “Chicks” than “Dixie”, a shorthand for the former Confederate states, although they warned the Texas trio that listeners in the northern states might be put off. But Natalie Maines and sisters Emily Strayer and Martie Maguire went on to become one of the biggest country acts of all time.

The Dixie Chicks brought traditional instrumentation back to a genre that had been growing overly slick. They used their country bona fides in cheeky proto-feminist classics. Almost everything they did riled purists and pearl-clutchers, but that did not stop their first album for Sony, 1998’s *Wide Open Spaces*, selling more copies that year than every other country act combined.

Their slogan – “Chicks rule” – became country’s “girl power” (their unfiltered sisterhood earned them many Spice Girls comparisons), while the Dixie element made rightwing listeners assume incorrectly that the women shared their politics. (In fact, it referenced Little Feat’s 1973 song *Dixie Chicken*.)

The band’s conservative fans were in for a shock. In March 2003, eight days before George W Bush declared war on Iraq, Maines, the lead singer, told a crowd in London that she was “ashamed” that Bush was also from Texas. Denunciation and death threats followed. Local



▲ Ready to run again

The Chicks: Emily Strayer, Natalie Maines and Martie Maguire

ROBIN HARPER

► Dancing with the devil

The trio perform in Cincinnati during the 2016 DCX world tour

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY



We didn't just start thinking about the name change two weeks ago

radio stations organised CD-burning protests and US conglomerates banned them from the airwaves, hobbling their career. They would release one more album, in 2006, their last for 14 years.

In March this year, they announced their comeback with the single *Gaslighter*, a triumphant riposte to men who like to silence women. Then the Covid-19 lockdown struck, George Floyd died in police custody and global Black Lives Matter protests changed the tone of their new album campaign. Confederate statues were falling; the country group Lady Antebellum (another fond term for the Confederate south) changed their name to Lady A. Should the Dixie Chicks not follow suit? "For many black people, it conjures a time and a place of bondage," wrote the *Variety* critic Jeremy Helligar.

The trio were unusually quiet as the issue grew louder over two weeks in late June. Then they released a new single, *March March*, under a new name: the Chicks. The only explanation was a line on their website: "We want to meet this moment."

The change was a long time coming, says Strayer, the banjo player, a few days after the news is announced. The band had begun to feel uncomfortable about the name on their 2016 tour, she says, with "racist rhetoric" rife in the year of Donald Trump's presidential campaign. "The Chicks" and the abbreviation "DCX" appeared on their merchandise and branding. "Things to water it down," Strayer says. "Current events were the tipping point, but it wasn't like we started thinking about it just two weeks ago."

The outrage cycle that followed the official name change wrote itself. Rightwing commentators accused them of virtue signalling. The Texas Republican senator Ted Cruz said they had told "the entire South to p*** off". Strayer refuses to dignify Cruz's tweet with a response and says she has no idea what virtue signalling is. She laughs when I explain: telegraphing woke values to look good online. "You're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't, so we just try and keep our own compass on all that stuff." They expected the trolls: "The people who have hated us since the Bush comment are probably the same people saying that stuff."

As the band Zoom in from their respective quarantines - Maines is in Los Angeles, Strayer in San Antonio, Texas, and Maguire cross-state in Austin - the app struggles at times with their high-volume, gleeful dissection of their history. Maines is the least filtered and cackles as often as most people breathe. Sisters Strayer and Maguire, a fiddle virtuoso, are ostensibly more demure, but equally willing to question authority. There is none of the tedious, media-trained diplomacy and stonewalling you get from even supposedly radical modern country stars.

Childhood bluegrass prodigies Strayer and Maguire formed the band in Dallas in 1989, when they were on the cusp of their 20s. Another band member left to devote herself to more traditional music and they fired a vocalist when they met



Maines; her father, Lloyd, a renowned pedal steel player, had passed them her demo tape.

When they signed with Sony, they had it written into their contract that they would play on their own records, and they fought to preserve their Texas grit when a producer said they would have to remove the banjo and fiddle for radio edits. "It was very important for us not to 'go Nashville'," Maines says.

Instruments intact, three songs from their 1998 album went to No 1. Still, they often felt underestimated, Maguire says. "Like, there's no way you could be decent-looking and play an instrument and be female." It motivated her. "I thought, I wanna play so fast and so hard and prove them wrong," she says, balling her fists. Back then, they did not think of themselves as feminists, although they embrace it now. While they experienced iffy behaviour, such as radio promoters asking to meet them in strip clubs, they never faced direct sexual harassment, something Maguire puts down to strength in numbers: "They would have got a punch in the stomach."

Their next album, 1999's brazen *Fly*, followed quickly. It would inspire a nine-year-old Taylor Swift to learn the guitar. Today, Swift tells me: "They showed me that women in country music could play their own instruments, make their own creative choices and dictate their own artistic departures; that they could be stoic, angry, daydreamy, romantic, ferocious, prideful and sorrowful. And that complexity was nothing to apologise for."

The 2006 documentary *Shut Up and Sing* - a suggestion that followed the group at the time - ends with them back in London, touring their fourth album, *Taking the Long Way*, and telling the crowd they are still ashamed that the president is from Texas. The film's producer, Harvey Weinstein, had tried to bully the film's female directors into a happy ending, which felt false. "He was standing, screaming at them," Maguire says. "We were all dumbfounded."

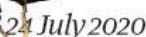
Maines describes that encounter as "one of the scariest meetings we've ever had" - and the source of her one regret in life. "I really wish I could be back in that room and go: 'Listen, motherfucker, don't you talk to our directors



From left, Martie Maguire, Emily Strayer and Natalie Maines

IMAGE GROUP/LA; JACK THOMAS/WIRE IMAGE

If you don't feel right about something, you should be able to speak up





FICTION

PIPERS AT THE GATE

The latest chapter of David Mitchell's metanovel portrays a band on the rise in 60s London, with all the hectic spirit that brings

By Sarah Perry

▲ **London calling**
Mitchell's novel visits the city in the 60s
MIRRORPIX/GETTY

David Mitchell's eighth novel, *Utopia Avenue*, arrives both as a distinct and distinctive book, and as a further chapter in the ongoing "metanovel" that constitutes his work to date. At first, it appears closer in theme and style to the semi-autobiographical *Black Swan Green* than to the giddy, multivalent *Cloud Atlas* or *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*: it is placed firmly and with pleasing particularity in the 1960s, and is in effect a coming-of-age novel. What comes of age is *Utopia Avenue*, "the most curious British band you've never heard of". The band comprises the middle-class folk singer Elf Holloway, who calls to mind Sandy Denny, and who is cautiously examining her sexuality; Jasper de Zoet, whose genius on lead guitar is compromised by aural hallucinations; Dean Moss, bassist, not yet wrenched out of his traumatising family past; and the drummer Griff, who is of the four the most opaque, though we are assured he is a Yorkshireman.

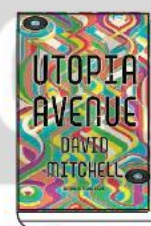
They are brought together and in due course managed by Levon Frankland, previously seen as a much older man in *The Bone Clocks*, whose fur hat and blue glasses Dean worriedly parses as those of "a queer beatnik". An immense cast – drawn from homes in Kent, clubs in the West End and parties in New York – attends the band, as Mitchell traces *Utopia Avenue*'s uneven trajectory from the Gravesend Working Men's Club and the bar at Brighton Polytechnic via Italy to Manhattan. The band acquire success, ardent fans and a degree of pleasant notoriety, but not – of course – happiness; and Mitchell is expert at excavating the seams of loss, ambition and mere chance that lie under the edifice of fame. Each member experiences the irresolvable tensions between the demands and rewards of art and ambition, and the

opposing forces of duty, failure and sorrow. Death arrives suddenly; love is offered, withdrawn and squandered. The impulse to make music is inexplicable and irresistible.

The reader is impelled from the first by a kind of rushing, gleeful energy: "Dean hurries past the Phoenix Theatre, dodges a blind man in dark glasses, steps on to Charing Cross Road ..." It is London, 1967. It is both familiar and impossibly distant, the capital as signifier of the era in which the band is formed – modernity butting up against a grim, confined sensibility.

Mitchell is evidently enthralled by both the romance and the practicality of music. The novel is presented as a series of albums – on vinyl, of course – composed of songs, each of which is devoted to a character, so that we are drawn for a time to Elf and her perfidious ex-boyfriend; and then on to Dean, and his large working-class family (Mitchell elects to convey Dean's class by rendering his estuary accent in type – "What about my gear? Stealing that too, are yer?" – which grates a little). Whole songs and scraps of lyrics by band members are reproduced on the page, and are simultaneously trite and sincere, like all the best pop songs; the frustrating, elusive magic of wresting melody out of four strings and a pick-up is vividly evoked, as Jasper "slams into an amp-blowing, bent-string howl and fires off a scale of triads, sliding from high E, all the way down".

The novel's prose is for the most part consciously easeful and frictionless: it is a supremely readable novel, if the quality of readability is taken to be one that is difficult to achieve and a relief to encounter. It is enlivened by an attentive eye for the particulars, as when "rudderless cloud-wrecks float by, unmoored", or when, at a dinner party, "served in a pea-green porcelain boat, the mussel shells are blue-black on the outside and flint-grey inside ... candles are beeswax, linen is starched, cutlery is heavy". At times, the frictionless quality of the prose extends to the story itself, so that it is possible to read for several pages at a time without quite feeling that events and characters have landed on the consciousness. The book is most alive and most compelling when Mitchell slips the surly bonds of the realist premise and lands in his own extraordinary imagined worlds. This is not a novel that traces the vertiginous rise and calamitous fall of superstars; it is subtler. Mitchell does not castigate or punish *Utopia Avenue* for their yearning: he is kinder and more wise. He proposes instead that nothing could be more natural, or in fact more commendable, than acting on the old and common longing to be heard above the crowd, even – perhaps particularly – at the cost of security and sanity. After all, says Jasper de Zoet, "applause is the purest drug". SARAH PERRY'S MOST RECENT NOVEL IS *MELMOTH*



BOOK OF
THE WEEK

Utopia Avenue
by David Mitchell

24 July 2020 **The Guardian Weekly**

pressreader

PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED BY PRESSREADER
PressReader.com +1 604 278 4604
ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY - ORIGINAL COPY
COPYRIGHT AND PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW



A PARTING OF THE WAYS

POLITICS

Friends can quickly become foes as nativist falsehoods widen the divide, calling into doubt the future of democracy

By John Kampfner

▲ **Vox popular**
Santiago Abascal's
rightwing party
is now Spain's
third-largest

DAVID RAMOS/GETTY

Muslims make up around 4% of Spain's population. When asked to guess the percentage, Spanish respondents regularly give pollsters an inflated number. A similar discrepancy is found across all western democracies. Demographic alarm, whether based on reality, fantasy or stoked with falsehood, provides rich pickings for the nativist movements that have swept the world.

Santiago Abascal is leader of Spain's Vox party. As Anne Applebaum points out in her sweeping survey of political nationalisms, "the idea that Christian civilisation needs to redefine itself against the Islamic enemy has a special historic echo in Spain". The fact that a large proportion of immigrants come from Catholic Latin America is mostly ignored by the far right. Applebaum points out that in one of Abascal's campaigning videos, he "mounted a horse and, like the knights who once fought to reconquer Andalusia from the Arabs, rode across a southern Spanish landscape. Like so many internet memes, it was serious but unserious." It has been effective.

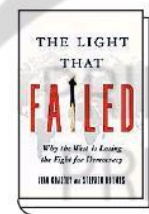
Last November, Vox made huge gains in the general election, becoming Spain's third-largest party.

Applebaum begins this engrossing account in her adopted Poland (she is married to a Polish former minister). She recalls a party she gave to celebrate the dawn of the millennium. "At that moment, when Poland was on the cusp of joining the west, it felt as if we were all on the same team. We agreed about democracy, about the road to prosperity, about the way things were going." Now she would cross the street to avoid some of her guests. The feeling is mutual. This is a political book; it is also intensely personal, and the more powerful for it.

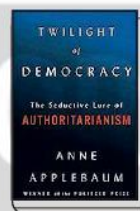
She names and shames a number of friends. Several, she says, peddle online antisemitic conspiracy theories. These people have not lost their jobs or missed out on housing as a result of migrants. They do not remotely fall into the category of the "left-behinds". They are highly educated and well travelled. Why, therefore, do they embrace and disseminate the lies and half-truths trotted out by Poland's Law and Justice party? History lesson number one: authoritarians need mass support, but, as with 1930s fascists, they also need the collaboration of people in high places. "Given the right conditions, any society can turn against democracy," the author notes.

The House of Terror museum, which narrates the history of communist and fascist oppression, is one of the first stops for visitors to Budapest. Applebaum recalls that she first met its director, Mária Schmidt, at the museum's opening in 2002. In recent years, Schmidt's trajectory, Applebaum argues, has followed that of many: she blames foreigners for Hungary's ills. The pair went from friendship to daggers drawn. During an ill-tempered (and one assumes final) meeting, Schmidt vented her fury towards all those seeking to undermine "Hungarian-ness". Usually the first on any Hungarian nationalist's enemies-of-the-state list is the billionaire philanthropist George Soros, whose Central European University has been shut down. The western media and western diplomats "talk down from above to those below, like it used to be with colonies", Schmidt tells Applebaum.

Twilight of Democracy tries to deconstruct the psychology and motivation of such people. For some it is the chance to be noticed; for others, it is revenge for slights. Applebaum moves on to Laura Ingraham, another former acquaintance, who has become host of a US political chat show. "She has, like so many others in the Fox universe, depicted illegal immigrants as thieves and murderers,



The Light That Failed: A Reckoning
by Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes



Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends
by Anne Applebaum

despite overwhelming evidence that immigrants commit fewer crimes overall than native-born Americans."

Career advancement may have guided her. But Applebaum believes it is more than that. The answer, she argues, may lie "in the depth of Ingraham's despair". She sees America, according to Applebaum, as "a dark, nightmarish place ... where the 'elite' is wallowing in decadence, disarray, death". How do these people actually believe this stuff? One senses a note of frustration as she struggles to answer the question.

My empathy with the author takes a dip when she turns her attention to Britain and a dinner she had with Boris Johnson, when he was mayor of London. The wannabe prime minister confessed that leaving the EU would be a disaster. Indeed, Applebaum recalls him saying that "nobody" wanted it. But why was she friends with him in the first place? It was clear from the get-go what Johnson was - a charlatan.

It is worth turning to Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes's book to understand how liberal democracy went so badly wrong after 1989, and how the right dominated the agenda.

At every step, the west suffered from hubris, naivety and ineptitude. It undermined its political offer to former communist states from the moment the Berlin Wall came down, through what Krastev calls its "casual condescension". The liberal democratic state could not be improved on, eastern Europeans were told: just adopt it. Disillusionment resulted from not just a sense of being told what to do, but also from the realisation that the masters weren't that good at the job. The financial crisis of 2008 shattered any remaining illusions.

The new nationalists turned imitation from a defensive to an offensive tool. Viktor Orbán in Hungary pretended to be a member of the family of nations with the EU, while undermining it. Vladimir Putin's ambitions were greater. Russia built Potemkin replicas of western institutions to undermine them.

Courts and elections were rigged and seen to be rigged. That constituted a win-win - Putin prevailed. He knew that everyone knew he was lying. That was the point. "Paying no price for telling easily exposable untruths is an effective way to display one's power and impunity."

The imitator resents the imitated. Equally, the imitated begins to resent the imitator. What happens when they join forces? Which takes us to Donald Trump, who "persistently rejects America's messianic self-understanding as well as the idea that the United States is a beacon of liberty and justice for all mankind". In Trump's worldview, Americanisation of the world hasn't helped America. China and Chinese jobs have prevailed, while "native" populations have suffered. Imitation has had its day. There is no one to imitate any more.

JOHN KAMPFNER IS A WRITER, BROADCASTER AND CULTURAL COMMENTATOR

FICTION

WHEN LOVE VANISHES

What drives a Colombian couple apart is easy to see, but what brought them together is not

By Holly Williams

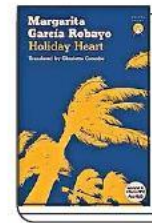
Colombian novelist, essayist and short story writer Margarita García Robayo is well known across Latin America, and widely translated, though only one collection, *Fish Soup*, has been available in English. Now, Charco press has followed that with her 2017 *Holiday Heart*, a novella that dissects a failing marriage with surgical precision.

After 19 years, Lucia and Pablo have stopped even "wondering why they're still there, oozing indifference towards one another". Then Pablo ends up in hospital with "holiday heart" - cardiovascular disease that often strikes around Christmas and new year, due to overindulging in rich food and booze. It's not the only thing he's been indulging in: Lucia is informed that Pablo was delivered to hospital by one of his students. She leaves their home in Connecticut to go to her parents' holiday apartment in Miami, taking their twin children with her.

Lucia and Pablo are Colombian immigrants who have made gilded lives in the US. But where Pablo still feels a deep yearning for his home country, Lucia revels in her rootlessness. García Robayo traces the fault lines left by the pressure of needing to be perceived as successful immigrants, and an accompanying corrosive snobbishness. Lucia and Pablo are casually cruel about fat people, poor people, black people, fellow Latinos.

It feels like there's scope for a larger work exploring these tensions - the complexities of the immigrant experience, and attendant status anxieties, form just a simmering backdrop to a tightly focused portrait of a relationship. García Robayo writes with caustic insight and brittle humour: as a portrait of people coming apart, *Holiday Heart* is brilliant, but what you don't get much of is why they were drawn together in the first place. *Observer*

HOLLY WILLIAMS IS AN ARTS WRITER AND CRITIC



Holiday Heart

by Margarita García Robayo;
translated by
Charlotte Coombe

PUZZLES

By Maslanka



1 The Hindoo Jar Brothers place 3 urns of identical appearance on the bar of the Last Chance Saloon. One contains 2 black balls; another 2 white balls; and the remaining one a white ball and a black ball. Of course we do not know which is which. Gullible Gus's task is to withdraw a white ball; and then (without replacing the white ball) a black ball. Gus chooses an urn and withdraws a white ball. Should he switch urns for his second draw?

2 Wordpool

FOULAGE

- a) snagging of a ship's propellers
- b) dog mess
- c) massage by kneading muscles
- d) time of disease

3 Same Difference

Identify the two words the spelling of which differs only in the letters shown:

- ***** (swap)
- *I**** (rant)

4 Dropouts

Each asterisk represents a missing letter. Identify the word:

G*A*P*S*

5 Missing Links

Find a word that follows the first word in the clue and precedes the second, in each case making a fresh word or phrase. Eg the answer to *fish mix* could be *cake* (*fishcake* & *cake mix*)...

- a) hot worker
- b) electricity teacher
- c) perfect drain
- d) raw witness
- e) slap pot
- f) face tree

© CMM2020 Solutions Page 62 →

HEALTH

ANGELS
AND
EGOS

In sickness and in fame, celebrities write of their experience of and thankfulness for the UK's National Health Service

By Fiona Sturges



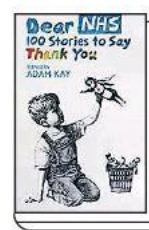
RUSSELL BOYCE/REUTERS

In 2018 Daisy May Cooper, who writes and stars in the BBC comedy *This Country*, was recovering in hospital after giving birth to her first baby, Pip, by emergency caesarean section. She was feeling emotional, although that had less to do with having brought forth new life than the fact that she had gone eight days without having a poo. “I forgot what it was to be human,” she writes, mournfully. “I had taken such a simple bodily function for granted - what I would give to have a dump.” Eventually, she burst into tears in front of a nurse, who rustled up some liquid laxatives and, half an hour later, gently led her to the nearest bathroom. “That angel in blue saved me,” she says. “I cried on the toilet in gratitude.”

Cooper's story is one of many moments of thankfulness and extreme over-sharing in *Dear NHS*, a collection of essays by celebrities and writers hastily gathered together by Adam Kay, the former junior doctor and mega-selling author of *This Is Going to Hurt*. Few things unite Britain in admiration and protectiveness as much as the NHS, so it's no surprise that the book - the profits of which will go to NHS Charities Together and the Lullaby Trust - has quite the roll-call of contributors, among them Paul McCartney, Malala Yousafzai, Mary Beard, Andrew Marr, Naomie Harris, Rob Brydon, Kate Tempest, Trevor McDonald, Emma Thompson and Stanley Tucci.

There are vivid tales here of broken bones, gaping wounds, burst appendixes, engorged boils, enlarged testicles and chronic diarrhoea. If love and gratitude are the prevailing emotions, mortification is a frequent visitor. Nish Kumar recalls the day he was sent to hospital after losing the end of a cotton bud in his ear, while Chris O'Dowd confesses how, aged 27, he collapsed with a suspected heart attack and was rushed to A&E, where it was decided he had trapped wind. Jilly Cooper remembers falling into the pond in her garden after a boozy lunch, cracking four ribs and puncturing a lung. More people than you might imagine lose their fingertips in kitchen accidents.

Elsewhere, there are some wildly surreal stories, from the novelist John Niven attempting to bring round a man who had overdosed on heroin by poking ice cubes up his bum, to a story from Irvine Welsh involving a samurai



**Dear NHS: 100
Letters to Say
Thank You**
edited by
Adam Kay

sword and a lost appendage. There are also moments of poignance - births, major illnesses, deaths and a suicide attempt - that changed lives forever.

Literary excellence may not be the point of a book such as this, but even so some of the entries are short on effort. Ricky Gervais provides a total of 10 lines comprising a Wikipedia-style

precis of his humble beginnings before noting that healthcare is why he's happy to pay his taxes “now that I've got a bob or two”, while the chef Jamie Oliver takes the “will this do?” approach to the next level as he cuts and pastes his recipes for veggie chilli and rye bread scones, both of which have long been available elsewhere.

Similarly dispiriting is the parade of comics whose stories of being treated by the NHS are built around the punchline of being recognised while someone inspects their rear end. Miranda Hart, who recalls a visit to hospital for an enema, wonders, perhaps in jest, whether she would get “preferential treatment because of the whole fame thing”. In the end she is relieved to observe that all the nurses “were showing the same level of attention to even the most cantankerous of patients”.

Yet amid these egregious tales of swollen egos are other, more generous essays about the experience of being hospitalised, or watching loved ones in distress, or that offer broader observations about why free healthcare is worth fighting for. Of the many bedside vigils, Sali Hughes's lyrical account of watching over her stricken son while observing the daily miracles performed by staff is a tearjerker.

Mark Gatiss's reflections on the death of his mother (“a little dot of fun Anglo-Irishness”), and later his sister and his brother-in-law, reveal a life tinged by tragedy. “Nothing about this is easy to write,” he reflects. “Except that knowing there is a system of care, a net to catch us when we fall, is one of this country's greatest success stories ... We simply couldn't survive without the NHS. It is the best of us.”

FIONA STURGES IS AN ARTS WRITER AND CRITIC

Steven Poole's
WORD OF THE WEEK

'Sorry'



Sorry seems to be the hardest word for Boris Johnson, who refused to apologise for blaming care homes for UK covid outbreaks. But why does “sorry” itself appear to have such magical power? **It is cognate with “sore” and with “sorrow”**, and so to be sorry has, from middle English, been to experience the pain of remorse. Strictly speaking, an “apology”, by contrast - originally a “defence”, from the Greek - is an expression of regret for unintended harm to another. Of course, “sorry” is not limited to personal remorse, for a situation can also be a sorry state of affairs. There is even such a thing as a “sorry-go-round”, which the OED defines as “a repetitive cycle of depressing events”, which presumably can be the case even if no one apologises for their hand in creating them.



Deseeding a cucumber is only the start of it. Using that teaspoon to scrape away the woody bark on

JAY RAYNER IS THE OBSERVER'S
RESTAURANT CRITIC



Sri Lankan cucumber and cashew curry



Now add the cucumber, cashews, turmeric and salt, stir-fry for two minutes, then add the coconut milk and stir. Bring to a simmer and cook until the cucumber is tender (but not soft) and its flesh slightly translucent - this should take about eight or so minutes; add more water, if need be, to thin out the sauce. Take off the heat, add lime juice to taste and serve in a shallow serving bowl with freshly steamed or boiled rice and lime wedges for squeezing over at the table.



